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The Guardian

Newspaper of the year

NHS doctors offered £5,000 to lure staff into private jobs

Exclusive Health firm spending thousands on 'golden hello' deals

Sarah Marsh
Consumer affairs correspondent

NHS doctors are being offered cash bonuses of up to £5,000 to recruit colleagues for jobs at private hospitals, as commercial healthcare providers compete with an

overstretched public health service for new staff.

US-owned HCA Healthcare, which runs more than 30 facilities in London and Manchester and claims to be the largest private provider in the world, is spending tens of thousands of pounds recruiting NHS-trained doctors, the Guardian can reveal.

Referral fees vary, depending on skills and seniority. According to marketing material seen by the Guardian and doctors working for HCA who asked not to be named, the company

is offering bonuses of £5,000 for intensive care doctors – one of the most in-demand specialisms – £2,500 for general resident doctors, and £1,000 for more junior roles.

The money is offered for staff who go on to work for HCA part- or full-time, meaning they either leave the NHS or reduce the hours they work in the public health service.

At the height of the pandemic, as state-funded hospitals were in danger of becoming overwhelmed, the company emailed recruitment

messages to NHS doctors offering golden hellos equivalent to 10% of annual salary.

Other perks for those who want to join the US health company include critical illness cover of up to £10,000 after a year of service, 50% off gym membership and dining out, life insurance and access to private GPs as often as needed.

The company, which is opening a £100m private hospital in Birmingham later this year, is also offering generous sums

The haves and have yachts Succession is back

What's On



ICC issues Putin arrest warrant for war crimes

Julian Borger Washington
Pjotr Sauer

The international criminal court in The Hague issued an arrest warrant yesterday for President Vladimir Putin for overseeing the abduction of Ukrainian children, pushing Russia further along the path to becoming a pariah state.

In granting the request for warrants by the ICC prosecutor, a panel of judges agreed there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that Putin and his children's rights commissioner, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, bore responsibility for the "unlawful deportation" of Ukrainian children.

The warrants are the first to be issued by the ICC for crimes committed in the Ukraine war, and it is one of the



Jurassic Park star Sam Neill at his farm in New Zealand

'I'm not afraid to die ... but it would annoy me' Exclusive Sam Neill reveals he has cancer

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ICC judges issue arrest warrant for Putin over alleged war crimes

Continued from page 1

rare occasions when the court has issued a warrant for a sitting head of state, putting Putin in the company of the former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and the former Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir.

Gaddafi was toppled and killed months after his warrant was announced. Bashir was also ousted and is in jail in Sudan, though he has yet to be transferred to The Hague.

Putin is likely to evade justice in the near future: Russia does not recognise the court's jurisdiction, and insisted yesterday it was not affected by the warrants. But the Russian leader will face limits on his freedom of travel to ICC member states, further deepening his isolation.

The ICC pre-trial chamber of judges had considered keeping the warrants secret, but decided that making them public could "contribute to the prevention of the further commission of crimes".

It is unclear how many children have been taken from Ukraine. Last month, the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab published a report



alleging that at least 6,000 children had been sent to Russian "re-education" camps in the past year.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, estimated the number of deported children at more than 16,000 and said the warrants represented "an historic decision which will lead to historic accountability." He added: "It would have been impossible to enact such a criminal operation without the say-so of the man at the helm of the terrorist state."

The ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, said many of the children taken from Ukraine had been put up for adoption in Russia and that Putin had issued a decree expediting the conferral of Russian citizenship on them, making them easier to adopt.

"My office alleges that these acts, amongst others, demonstrate an intention to permanently remove these children from their own country," Khan said. "We must ensure that those responsible for alleged crimes are held accountable and that children are returned to their families and communities."

The ICC judges' statement added: "There are reasonable grounds to

believe that Mr Putin bears individual criminal responsibility for the aforementioned crimes." It said Putin had both committed the acts directly and failed to stop others from doing so.

The Kremlin was defiant in the face of the ICC announcement. "The decisions of the international criminal court have no meaning for our country," the foreign ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said on her Telegram channel. "Russia is not a party to the Rome statute of the international criminal court and bears no obligations under it."

Lvova-Belova told Russian media that the arrest warrant reflected "appreciation" for her work "to help the children of our country, that we

'We must ensure that those responsible for alleged crimes are held accountable'

Karim Khan
ICC prosecutor

Wanted man

What does the move mean for Russia's leader?

Peter Beaumont



What is the international criminal court arrest warrant for?

The court has issued arrest warrants for the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and its commissioner for children's rights, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, in relation to the forced deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia, where many have been adopted by Russians. Forced deportation of populations is recognised as a crime under the Rome statute that established the court.

Russia was a signatory to the Rome statute but withdrew in 2016, saying it did not recognise the court's jurisdiction.

Although Ukraine is itself not a signatory to the court in The Hague, it granted the ICC jurisdiction to

investigate war crimes committed on its territory. Four visits by the ICC's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, over the past year have led to a ruling that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that Mr Putin bears individual criminal responsibility" for the child abductions.

What does that mean?

Because Russia does not recognise the court and does not extradite its citizens, it is highly unlikely that Putin or Lvova-Belova will be surrendered to the court's jurisdiction soon.

But the issuing of the warrant remains a highly significant moment for several reasons. It sends a signal to senior Russian officials - both military and civilian - who might be vulnerable to prosecution now or in the future and would further limit their ability to travel internationally, potentially including attendance at international forums.

Don't serving heads of government enjoy immunity?

While the ICC does not recognise immunity for heads of state in cases involving war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, South Africa controversially declined to enforce an ICC warrant

for the arrest of the Sudanese dictator Omar al-Bashir during a visit in 2015.

Pretoria argued that it saw "no duty under international law and the Rome statute to arrest a serving head of state of a [ICC] non-state-party such as Omar al-Bashir" and several other countries that he visited also declined to arrest him.

The arrest of the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in London in 1998 on an international warrant issued by the Spanish judge Baltasar Garçon illustrates the difficulties involved in such immunity issues.

Pinochet claimed immunity as a former head of state - a claim rejected by the British courts - but ultimately the then British home secretary, Jack Straw, allowed him to return home on health grounds.

So what is the point of this?

While Putin seems secure in his power now and safe from extradition, a future Kremlin leader might decide it is more politic to send him to The Hague than to protect him. A good example is Slobodan Milošević, a former president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, who was indicted on a series of war crimes charges by the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the

◀ Putin at a patriotic concert in Moscow in February. He is accused of overseeing abductions of children
PHOTOGRAPH: MAKSYM BLINOV/SPUTNIK/GETTY

don't leave them in the war zone, that we take them out".

Ukraine welcomed the decision as a milestone on the road to holding Moscow accountable for its invasion. "The world received a signal that the Russian regime is criminal and its leadership will be held accountable," the prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin, said on social media.

The Russian leadership has been overt about its removal of Ukrainian children. In February, Lvova-Belova appeared on television telling Putin about the programme and thanking him for being able to "adopt" a 15-year-old boy from Mariupol.

Wayne Jordash, a Kyiv-based international human rights lawyer, said: "There's a clear case here against Putin. I think this is what international prosecutors have failed to do over the last 20 years... It's one of the worst crimes being committed."

The warrant for Putin's arrest was welcomed by Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, who called it "the start of the process of accountability", and by the UK foreign secretary, James Cleverly, who said: "Those responsible for horrific war crimes in Ukraine must be brought to justice."

The US response was more guarded. It is not an ICC member, and the Pentagon has resisted cooperation with the court out of fear that US soldiers could potentially face trial.

"There is no doubt Russia is committing war crimes and atrocities in Ukraine, and we have been clear that those responsible must be held accountable," Adrienne Watson, the national security council spokeswoman, said. "The ICC prosecutor makes his own decisions based on the evidence before him."

midst of the war in Kosovo in 1999. In 2001, amid a struggle between key opposing figures in Serbia following Milošević's fall from power, prime minister Zoran Đinđić ignored a court ruling banning the extradition and ordered the transfer of Milošević to The Hague, saying: "Any other solution except cooperation [with The Hague] would lead the country to disaster."

Milošević's initial arrest - preceding his transfer - followed pressure on the Yugoslav government to detain the former president or risk losing substantial US economic aid and loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Are other warrants likely to follow?

The judge added that the prosecutor could form cases of new allegations against Putin, thus expanding the warrants.

Human Rights Watch described the decision to issue an arrest warrant for Putin as a "wake-up call to others committing abuses or covering them up."

"The ICC has made Putin a wanted man and taken its first step to end the impunity that has emboldened perpetrators in Russia's war against Ukraine for far too long," said Balkees Jarrah of Human Rights Watch.

Mission impossible: Cruise told he cannot land helicopters on islands where polar bears are the stars

Jon Henley
Sam Jones

Despite his talent for saving “Hollywood’s ass”, demolishing two chicken tikka masalas in one sitting and escaping enemy territory in decrepit F-14s, Tom Cruise appears to have conceded that some missions – especially those involving polar bears, helicopters and paperwork – really are impossible.

Yesterday the producers of the latest *Mission: Impossible* film abandoned their attempt to obtain permission for dozens of helicopter landings on Svalbard, the protected Arctic archipelago halfway between Norway and the north pole where polar bears outnumber people.

It emerged earlier this week that the makers of *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part Two*, were seeking to challenge the Svalbard governor’s decision to deny them landing permits for the filming of the eighth blockbuster in the series, which is due to hit screens in 2024.

The local authorities refused permission for the 40-odd helicopter landings on various sites requested by PolarX, the local production company involved, citing concerns over disturbance to wildlife.

According to the public broadcaster NRK, filming of some scenes began in Svalbard this week, with crews in place and the vessel *PolarXplorer*, which has been chartered for the production, docked in Longyearben, the archipelago’s de facto capital.

Cruise, who was pictured on the streets of Longyearben on Thursday, declined to discuss the matter with the local paper, *Svalbardposten*, saying only: “It’s wonderful to be here.”

By the following day, however, PolarX had abandoned its attempt to get Norway’s environment agency to overturn the governor’s decision.

“We were just informed that the film production team just dropped the complaint to our agency on this matter,” a spokesperson for the agency told the Guardian. “The production company said they had other solutions.”

A spokeswoman for PolarX declined to comment on the matter, citing a general production non-disclosure agreement.

According to a letter sent by the production company’s lawyers – which was obtained by *Svalbardposten* – a way out of the impasse had indeed been agreed. “While a complaint to the Norwegian environment agency was deemed necessary due

to the significant time pressure, the production has continuously worked on alternative solutions to meet the governor’s concerns,” the letter said. “This work has been successful, and the parties no longer see a need to maintain the complaint.”

Local media had reported the decision was based on section 73 of the Svalbard Environment Act, which requires traffic on Svalbard “not to damage or degrade the natural environment ... or lead to unnecessary disturbance of people or wildlife”.

The archipelago – which has a human population of 2,700 – is a haven for a wide variety of species including arctic foxes, bearded seals, walrus, Svalbard reindeer, five species of seals, 12 species of whales and about 3,000 polar bears.

The Norwegian media have said PolarX stressed in its application “previous productions in Svalbard have had a global audience, spreading understanding of the Arctic wilderness and history” and promoting “a positive view ... of the environment”.

But the Svalbard authorities decided that given “the purpose of these flights”, permission could not be granted for the helicopter



◀ There are about 3,000 polar bears on the Svalbard archipelago, outnumbering the human population

PHOTOGRAPH: KRIS GRABIEC/SHUTTERSTOCK

▼ Tom Cruise in a *Mission: Impossible* film. The instalment being filmed now is scheduled to hit the big screen in 2024

PHOTOGRAPH: COLLECTION CHRISTOPHEL/ALAMY



“This is a completely different type of helicopter use”

Kristin Heggelund
Environmental protection

▼ The Bond movie *Die Another Day*, starring Pierce Brosnan, was however allowed to film in Svalbard

PHOTOGRAPH: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

landings, in part because of the precedent it might set “in the context of the goal of limited traffic on Svalbard”.

The archipelago’s head of environmental protection, Kristin Heggelund, told NRK the aim was to maintain “an almost untouched environment”. Landing permits had been granted in the recent past, but mostly for wildlife documentaries, she said.

“This is a completely different type of helicopter use” that goes beyond overflying and the occasional landing, she said. “It’s a feature film. They

want to use helicopter landings as part of the actual film, so with considerable activity on the ground.”

Not all Svalbard residents were happy with the ban. Ronny Brunvoll, head of Visit Svalbard, said he questioned whether it was “sensible and necessary to be so categorical in the approach to business activities on the archipelago”.

“I ask myself if it is necessary every time that conservation interests meet business interests,” he said. “We recognise the protection of vulnerable nature has priority.”

“But at the same time there must be a Norwegian presence and activity on the islands.”

The local business association also said exceptions could perhaps be made for the occasional high-profile feature that might boost the image of Svalbard, which has served as a backdrop for films including the 2002 Bond movie *Die Another Day*.

However Aleksander Øren Heen, an environment minister, told the broadcaster the principle of the government’s Svalbard policy was that “in the event of a conflict between environmental protection and other interests, the environment must weigh more heavily”.





The poison umbrella Film sheds new light on infamous cold war killing

Shaun Walker

Central and eastern Europe correspondent

It was one of the most audacious murders of the cold war: the emigre Bulgarian writer Georgi Markov was waiting for a bus by London's Waterloo Bridge when a man bumped into him with the tip of his umbrella, pushing a tiny poisoned pellet into Markov's leg. Four days later he was dead.

A Danish documentary out this week sheds new light on the prime suspect in the 1978 killing, the Italian-born Bulgarian agent Francesco Gullino, known as Agent Piccadilly. It also raises a range of new questions about why Gullino was never arrested for the killing.

A unique cold war character, Gullino was a manipulative, chameleonic figure who worked for Bulgarian intelligence for years. He remained a free man until his death in 2021, despite the evidence against him and Scotland Yard homing in on him as the main suspect in the case.

"He was a master in infiltration, he could go into any kind of environment and become the person he wanted to," said Ulrik Skotte, the documentary's director, who has been tracking Gullino's story for three decades.

"People around him die and he's like a shadow, he just moves on," said Skotte.

Gullino was born in the Italian town of Bra in 1945, and orphaned at a young age. He was arrested for smuggling in Bulgaria in 1970 and appears to have been turned by

the country's intelligence service, who offered him a choice of prison or a life of glamorous international espionage work.

His file in the Bulgarian archives contains detailed information about his training, missions and the originals of numerous false passports issued to Gullino by the Bulgarians. He is identified by the code name Agent Piccadilly.

However, the pages relating to the months around the Markov killing are missing from Gullino's file, apparently after the country's intelligence services purged the archives of incriminating evidence during the collapse of communism. This has made it impossible to prove definitively that Gullino was the man with the umbrella.

There is, however, circumstantial evidence linking him to the crime. Stamps in one of his fake passports show he was in London for several weeks before the murder. Shortly before travelling to London he was in Bulgaria for what is described as "special training", and a note on his file shows he met the head of the intelligence service for dinner, an extremely rare occurrence for a foreign agent.

The next surviving entry on his file is Gullino arriving in Rome, where he "established visual contact" with a Bulgarian agent by walking in St Peter's Square with a copy of Newsweek under his arm. This, it seems, was the signal that the operation had gone successfully. Soon after the killing, Gullino received a top award.

Markov, a writer who defected from communist Bulgaria and took a job at the BBC World Service in



▲ New light on why prime suspect Francesco Gullino was not arrested

London, fell ill the evening of the attack, and died in hospital four days later aged 49.

British authorities were initially sceptical of Markov's claims he had been poisoned, but the disbelief dissipated when a tiny pellet containing ricin was found in Markov's leg. The Guardian, reporting on the murder at the time, wrote that it "brought the world of James Bond to reality". However, Scotland Yard drew a blank on identifying the killer.

"They had all the evidence. He's by far the biggest spy case we ever had"

Ulrik Skotte
Danish filmmaker

In 1993, British authorities finally homed in on Gullino as the prime suspect based on information from Bulgaria, and a team from Scotland Yard interviewed him together with Danish authorities in Copenhagen. No arrest was made.

Skotte first got involved in the Gullino story at that time, through his friend Franco Invernizzi, an Italian-Danish film director who knew Gullino well and wanted to make a film about him.

That film never happened, but the novichok poisoning of the Russian defector Sergei Skripal in Salisbury in 2018 revived Skotte's interest in Gullino. He tried to contact Invernizzi but found he had died in 2005. "It turned out Invernizzi had appeared in a documentary about the Markov murder and talked about Gullino. Later, the pair went for dinner, and the day after that, [Invernizzi] died," Skotte said, recounting the memories of Invernizzi's family.

Invernizzi's widow gave Skotte several boxes of materials the late filmmaker had collected related to Gullino, which only deepened the mystery further. They contained hundreds of photographs of naked women, many in pornographic poses, apparently part of a scam Gullino had set up persuading women he ran a modelling agency and manipulating them into photoshoots and sex acts. It was sharply at odds with the view of most of Gullino's friends in Copenhagen that he was asexual.

Skotte was also amazed to discover that for years, Invernizzi had secretly taped his conversations with Gullino and many other people with whom

▲ The London bus stop where Georgi Markov, left, was murdered by a poison pellet in 1978

PHOTOGRAPHS: AP; PAUL FIEVEZ/REX

he discussed the case. The boxes contained tapes with hours of recordings of conversations with Gullino. In some of them, Gullino talked of his admiration for fascism. There was also a box of Gullino's possessions, including two copies of Mein Kampf and a Mussolini calendar.

Skotte's information shed a very different light on Gullino, said Christopher Nehring, a fellow of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation at Sofia University and a specialist in the communist-era Bulgarian intelligence service.

"There was so much stuff that Gullino had hidden even from his Bulgarian handlers ... the man was a world-class liar," he said.

For Skotte, the fact Gullino was not arrested back in 1993, either by Scotland Yard or Danish authorities, is a mystery.

"They had all the evidence he was a spy. He's by far the biggest spy case we ever had and he was left untouched," said Skotte, who obtained a transcript of the 1993 interrogation. He is now following up leads suggesting Gullino may have cooperated with western services, giving evidence on other major cases in exchange for remaining free, though as yet there is no hard evidence.

A team from the Metropolitan police visited Bulgaria in 2007 to investigate the case once more, and Skotte said he had been contacted by Scotland Yard asking to see his research files for the documentary.

Yet all the time, Gullino remained at liberty. Skotte interviewed him in 2021 at his small and dirty apartment in Austria, when he again denied any link to the murder. He died soon after, apparently alone and friendless.

"Even though he was never in a courtroom, he was punished by being the most lonely man in the world," said Skotte.

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Ann Summers boss
dies aged 62
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Cutting allergy risks
Give peanut products
to babies, experts say
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National

Leading doctor warns of lung damage as he raises alarm over rise in teenage vaping

Rachel Hall
Clea Skopeliti

One of the UK's leading respiratory doctors has raised the alarm about the exploding popularity of vaping among teenagers, saying that without urgent regulation a generation could end up with long-term additions and lung damage.

Dr Mike McKean, vice-president of policy for the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health, said vaping was becoming an "epidemic" among teenagers, even though the purchase and use of e-cigarettes is illegal before the age of 18. If its rapid growth maintains the same trajectory, almost all children will vape within five years.

McKean estimates that prevalence could now be as high as 15%, after NHS figures for 2021 showed that 9% of 11- to 15-year-old children used e-cigarettes, up from 6% in 2018. The figure rises to 18% for

15-year-olds, while 2022 figures for Scotland showed levels at 10% for 15- to 16-year-olds.

"This is a problem the UK should take seriously. Walk past a school at closing time and you'll see what happens - large numbers of children vaping," McKean said.

"That's huge amounts of children spending money on products that are not cheap, and they're inhaling chemicals we don't know the long-term effects of. There can be large amounts of nicotine, especially in vapes from overseas, and children are becoming addicted to a drug."

He said there was "lots of evidence" to suggest that many children started vaping despite never having smoked, meaning they were not using it as a tool to quit. Children as young as nine or 10 were starting to vape, with anecdotal evidence that some children moved on to cigarettes.

Vaping involves inhaling nicotine in a vapour rather than smoke,

removing two of the most harmful elements of smoking (tar and carbon monoxide), which makes it a good tool for weaning smokers off cigarettes. However, its long-term health effects remain uncertain.

In recent months, the calls from campaigners for tighter rules around the advertising and packaging of vapes have been growing louder. They argue that the rules should mirror those for tobacco, including plain packaging and health warnings.

Last month, England's chief medical officer, Sir Chris Whitty, described the marketing of vapes as "utterly unacceptable".

Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner for England, told the Guardian that child vaping was one of her priorities for the year ahead, as "we don't yet know enough about the long-term impact this might have on children's physical health".

McKean said it was staggering that the regulation of vapes had not

So how dangerous is it?

Vapes work by heating a liquid that typically includes nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerine, and flavourings.

Vapes and cigarettes can be similar in nicotine content, though this varies considerably by brand. UK regulations limit nicotine content to 2%, or 20mg/mL in vapes, with e-liquid limited to 2ml in size if they contain nicotine.

This compares with an average of 12mg of nicotine in a cigarette. Vapes contain fewer toxic chemicals, but nicotine causes cravings, raising blood pressure and spiking adrenaline, increasing risk of a heart attack. A third of vapes sold on the high street are illegal, say Trading Standards with higher nicotine levels and unknown chemicals. **Rachel Hall**

been brought in line with that of cigarettes. He said companies were taking "an insidious and quite disturbing approach" to the marketing of vapes, using sweet flavours and colourful packaging to target children.

This was reflected in research from King's College London and Action on Smoking and Health, which found that removing branding from e-cigarettes could deter teenagers from buying them without reducing their appeal to adults.

John Dunne, director general of the UK Vaping Industry Association, said: "No one under the age of 18 should be using a vape device - that's the regulations. We therefore welcome any credible research that can highlight the long-term health risks of vaping to minors. However, any future policy or regulation needs to concentrate on cutting sources of supply to minors and dealing with the rogue operators, not wholesale bans on the likes of flavours and disposable vapes which play a significant role in helping adult smokers quit."

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: "We are clear that children should not use vapes and have introduced regulations to prevent them from vaping. The law protects children from vapes through restricting sales to over-18s only."

'He's addicted' Mother tells how her son got hooked

Clea Skopeliti

When Sarah caught her 13-year-old son vaping in his bedroom last year, he tried a classic teenage line on her.

"He said, it's not mine, it's my friend's," recalls the teacher from West Yorkshire. "I said, yeah, pull the other one, it's got bells on."

Liam, who is now 14, first tried vaping with two friends after one of them sneaked a parent's vape. "They'd been watching videos on TikTok showing tricks you can do," says Sarah. "I think they thought it was cool."

Liam is far from alone. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of 11- to 17-year-olds in Britain who vape rose from 3.3% to 7%, according to Action on Smoking and Health. The number who had tried e-cigarettes rose from 11.2% to 15.8%.

A year on, Sarah says her son is "completely addicted". When she first caught him, she "dropped down on him really hard". "We



grounded him and took everything off him," she says. He told her he didn't realise it was addictive; he thought he'd be able to stop easily.

But a month later he was caught stealing a vape. She said she was

'He tried to quit but was beside himself with craving'

Sarah
Mother

"disgusted", and made him pay the shopkeeper back and write a letter of apology. Feeling "backed into a corner", Sarah changed tack and bought him a refillable vape; she hopes to help him quit by reducing the strength of the e-liquid.

Liam still vapes daily. He tried to quit in October, announcing one morning that he had smashed up his vape. But when he got home from school that afternoon, he said he'd had "the worst day of his life".

"He was just beside himself with craving," says Sarah, adding he had begged her to go buy him a vape.

"He just couldn't calm down - he was saying, 'I'm never going to be able to stop'. It broke my heart."

Liam used to be "mad into mountain biking" but is "just not interested now - he runs out of breath", Sarah says. He vapes on the way to school, in the toilets between every lesson, during breaks, and on the way home.

It is a story that is playing out in many secondary schools. Before the summer holidays, Laura*, a secondary school teacher in Tyne and Wear, would catch a student vaping once a fortnight. Lately,

◀ **The number of 11- to 17-year-olds vaping more than doubled in a year**
 PHOTOGRAPH: ALEXSANDRU/GETTY IMAGES

it's daily. She says: "From about 13 upwards many of them have vapes - as soon as they're out of school gates they go in their pockets."

Laura has noticed a change in behaviour in class, saying: "You can see when they're starting to get edgy before break time. They might get a bit snappy or angsty. They will then go to the toilets to vape because they haven't had any for two or three hours in lessons."

The school has a zero-tolerance policy to vaping on premises: when pupils are caught, the e-cigarettes are confiscated and parents or guardians informed. Laura says their reaction is mixed. While many are "concerned and disappointed", some have the opposite reaction, "giving [the vape] back to the student in front of us".

"Students see it as the norm," she explains. "Their parents vape, their friends vape. If we're teaching about smoking they say it's disgusting. They see [vaping] as a totally different thing."

Most experts agree vaping carries far lower risks than smoking, says Ann McNeill, professor of tobacco addiction at King's College London. But she adds: "If you've got something very dangerous and something much less dangerous, it doesn't mean it's harmless. If you smoke, there's never going to be a situation when it won't be safer to vape, but if you've never smoked, don't take it up."

* Names have been changed

▼ Striking teachers march through central London on Wednesday

PHOTOGRAPH: JOÃO DANIEL PEREIRA/
STORY PICTURE AGENCY



Sunak ready to make pay concessions in effort to bring swift end to strikes

Heather Stewart
Kiran Stacey
Richard Adams

Rishi Sunak is preparing to make fresh concessions to end months of public sector strikes as negotiations with teachers begin this weekend and junior doctors agreed to formal pay talks.

With No 10 now keen to see all the disputes resolved in the coming weeks, talks between teaching unions and the Department for Education started yesterday and are due to continue through the weekend.

The pay offer by the health secretary, Steve Barclay, to NHS unions on Thursday underlined the government's preparedness to compromise, after a months-long standoff in which ministers insisted there was no extra money for the current financial year.

NHS staff including nurses, porters and ambulance crews were offered a one-off bonus of up to 8.2% for this year and a pay rise of 5% from April, with more for the lowest paid,

a deal the government hoped would encourage other unions to the table.

Most NHS unions involved in the dispute are recommending the offer to their members, who will have to approve it in a vote. Last night the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said that junior doctors' leaders in the British Medical Association had also agreed to start formal talks following a three-day strike this week that led to more than 175,000 appointments and procedures being delayed. The DHSC said the talks would be on the same terms as those for other NHS unions.

However, questions continued yesterday about how the increase will be paid for. DHSC had previously only received funding from the Treasury for a 3.5% rise, and it is unclear where the difference will come from. A DHSC source conceded that efficiency savings were likely to be part of the answer.

"We do expect efficiencies to be part of that, and that's fine; Steve would rather money went on paying nurses, rather than being wasted

in parts of the department – but it wouldn't have any impact on patient care," the source said.

The shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, rejected that. "I don't think it's plausible for the health secretary on one hand to say there won't be cuts to frontline services, but on the other fail to explain where the money is actually coming from. I just don't think he is being serious," he said.

NHS leaders fear they could face a funding hit to cover the rise, as has happened in previous years, and are calling for greater clarity.

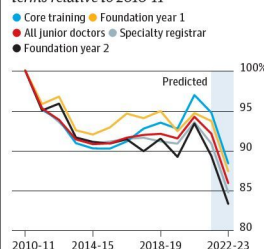
NHS England has previously warned that there is nothing left to cut as it has already made all the efficiency savings possible, and has a budget shortfall of up to £7bn for 2023-24, which its finance chief, Julian Kelly, said could result in "stringent choices" about investment, including for elective surgery, cancer performance, emergency pressures and mental health.

Sally Gainsbury, an expert on NHS finances at the Nuffield Trust, said there was "no room" in the NHS

budget to fund the pay rises, nor was there extra in the DHSC budget, as it had already asked the Treasury for an additional £6.2bn extra to cover Covid-related costs. She estimated that the 5% consolidated pay offer would cost £3.5bn, "roughly £2bn higher than the plans assume".

The average junior doctor salary has not kept pace with inflation in the past decade

Changes to junior doctors' pay in real terms relative to 2010-11



Source: Nuffield Trust analysis of NHS pay

A Downing Street source said Sunak had scrutinised the NHS offer personally. "He's all over the numbers; he would not have signed off on something that was not affordable. I think everybody wants to put these strikes behind us."

Teaching unions and the Department for Education issued a joint statement yesterday saying their talks would focus on pay, conditions and workload reduction. The National Education Union, which held two days of strikes in England this week, said it would "create a period of calm for two weeks" and hold back from announcing further action to allow talks to go ahead.

The parties, including the National Association of Head Teachers, the Association of School and College Leaders and the NASUWT teachers' union, have agreed a vow of media silence on the progress of talks.

It is understood unions were told limited resources were available to settle strikes, suggesting it was in their interest to resolve the dispute rapidly. A sticking point is whether any deal would have to be funded through existing school budgets.

Strikes by the University and College Union planned for next week will go ahead after its higher education committee voted to continue with action and declined to put employers' proposals to a members' vote.

Additional reporting Rachel Hall

Doctors given £5,000 to lure NHS workers to private hospitals

Continued from page 1

to those who join. In marketing material from February 2023, circulated on LinkedIn to people looking for work, HCA offered £10,000 welcome bonuses to paediatric nurses joining its Portland hospital in London, where royals including the Duchess of Sussex, and celebrities such as the chef Jamie Oliver's wife, Jools, have given birth.

A spokesperson for HCA UK said: "Along with many others both in the private and public sector, we offer all employees, not just clinical staff, a number of benefits and incentives as standard practice such as bonus schemes, critical illness cover, private healthcare, pension contributions and life insurance as well as provide all our employees with a one-off payment if they help recruit a new member of staff, whether clinical or non-clinical."

In contracts seen by the Guardian, HCA also has strict rules on where else employed doctors can work in the sector after leaving, stating that a year after quitting they cannot work for a rival. They specifically say "for the avoidance of doubt" that this includes Cleveland Clinic - another American-owned health firm - and the London Clinic.

The perks on offer will add to concerns about the creep of privatisation in Britain's healthcare provision and a drain of talent away from state-funded hospitals. The NHS is in the midst of a jobs crisis, and needs to find 62,000 medical professionals to fill vacancies across the UK, according to a report by MPs.

One senior doctor, speaking anonymously, said: "Generally speaking there is a raid on not just doctors but lots of layers of healthcare workers. There is a poaching of good, talented, NHS resource because the NHS has ceilings where there is no flexibility to incentivise staff. There is a drain by the independent sector of NHS talent at all levels."

David Rowland, the director of the Centre for Health and the Public Interest, an independent thinktank, said: "There is only one finite pool of medical professionals in the UK, the

vast majority of whom are employed directly by the NHS. Recruitment referral fees of this kind are likely to form part of an overall strategy employed by private hospital companies to pull medical professionals away from working in the NHS and towards the private sector."

He added: "As the for-profit healthcare sector grows, particularly in large cities like London, Manchester and Birmingham, where new facilities are opening we would expect to see more strategies of this kind designed to pull more medical professionals away from the NHS and towards the private sector."

Private hospitals have increasingly moved into offering intensive care services, when previously they tended to deal with elective procedures - treatment that is scheduled in advance because it does not involve a medical emergency.

HCA has high-dependency and critical care units in its main hospitals. "No matter how ill you become, when you're one of our patients, you won't have to be transferred to another hospital," its website says.

In a brochure sent to anyone who takes a job, it says: "If you know of a dedicated, skilled professional who measures up to the high standards we set for ourselves at HCA, point them in our direction. For every one of your referrals who makes the grade, you'll receive a bonus of £1,000."

In 2020, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, a HCA recruiter circulated the following email to NHS doctors: "We have competitive salary offers. We are recruiting in the range £60-75k, and at the moment we have a Golden Hello scheme where you would be eligible for a 10% salary bonus after one year service for critical care only."

At the end of November, a record 7.2 million patients in England were waiting for elective care, non-urgent medical treatment ranging from hip replacements to heart operations on the NHS.

More than half of those on the list had been waiting up to 18 weeks and about 400,000 patients had been waiting more than a year, according to data from NHS England.

People are increasingly opting to go private, with the number of patients paying directly for this increasing by 34% in the second quarter of 2022 compared with the same period in 2019, according to the Private Healthcare Information Network.

It comes amid a rise of US companies flocking to the sector. The Cleveland Clinic plans to open its third UK facility in London later this year, adding to its 184-bed hospital and six-floor clinic it opened in the capital city in 2021 and 2022 respectively.



Many celebrities and royals, including the Duchess of Sussex, choose to give birth at HCA's Portland hospital in London



The government had promised to invest in skills and wellbeing to make social care careers more attractive
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LEVENE/THE GUARDIAN

Care crisis Government 'to cut £250m' from recruitment fund

Robert Booth
Social affairs correspondent

Ministers are poised to cut £250m from investment in the social care workforce in England, it has been reported, in a move that the head of Care England says could set back care "for years to come".

With more than 165,000 care-worker vacancies and low pay driving staff to move to retail and hospitality, care providers and councils have been clamouring for investment in recruitment and retention. Low staffing levels are frequently noted as a cause of neglect and poor care by the Care Quality Commission watchdog.

However, according to the Health Service Journal, the government is set to water down a promise it made in the December 2021 social care white paper to dedicate £500m to "investment in knowledge, skills, health and wellbeing, and recruitment policies [that] will improve social care as a long-term career choice". This could be cut to £250m.

A further £300m plan "to integrate housing into local health and care strategies with a focus on increasing the range of new supported housing

options available" could also be axed, it was reported.

The Department of Health and Social Care did not deny the report. A spokesperson said it did not comment on leaks, adding: "The government remains committed to the 10-year vision set out in the People at the Heart of Care white paper and have made good progress on implementing it, including by boosting workforce capacity, digitisation ... and enhancing the use of data."

"We will soon publish a plan for adult social care system reform, setting out how we will build on this progress over the next two years."

Nadra Ahmed, the executive chair of the National Care Association,

165,000

The current number of vacancies in the care sector. The average hourly wage for care workers is £9.66

480,000

The number of additional social care workers that Skills for Care predicts the UK may need by 2035

Passport Office Employees to go on strike for five weeks

Jamie Grierson

Passport Office workers are to go on strike for five weeks in an escalation of a dispute over jobs, pay and conditions.

More than 1,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union working in passport offices in England, Scotland and Wales will take part in the action.

Those working in Durham, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport, Peterborough and Southampton will walk out from 3 April to 5 May, while those in Belfast will do so from 7 April to 5 May. The union said the action

was a "significant escalation" of its long dispute, and warned that it was likely to have a "significant impact" on the delivery of passports as the summer holidays approach.

The PCS general secretary, Mark Serwotka, said: "This escalation of our action has come about because, in sharp contrast with other parts of the public sector, ministers have failed to hold any meaningful talks with us, despite two massive strikes and sustained, targeted action lasting six months."

"Their approach is further evidence that they are treating their own workforce worse than anyone else."

'It's a national scandal that so many government workers are living in poverty'

Mark Serwotka
General secretary, PCS

which represents independent providers, said she believed the report was accurate, and described the prospect of the cut as "hugely disappointing".

"The sector continues to struggle with recruitment and retention," she said. "If this money has been taken out it is short-sighted. There could be other ways to utilise this fund if they spoke to the sector."

Average wages for care workers have recently been as low as £9.66 an hour, according to Skills for Care, a government-funded charity. They must increase in April when the national living wage rises to £10.42 an hour, an almost 8% increase that has not been matched by increases in council grants to pay for care beds, creating a fresh squeeze on the finances of care providers.

Martin Green, the chief executive of Care England, said: "We need that £500m to kickstart a much more strategic approach to workforce development. If it has been cut, it will set back social care for many years to come."

"People who receive services suffer because if we can't make social care an attractive place to develop careers we will see a reduction in services."

The "chronic situation" in which people "only get a service when in crisis" would worsen, putting extra pressure on the NHS, Green added.

Ministers are expected to announce a wider set of policies to boost the social care workforce in the coming weeks. Earlier this month Deborah Sturdy, the chief nurse for adult social care, joined speakers including Ed Balls, the former Labour minister, and the shadow care minister Liz Kendall, at a conference for young people about careers in care.

Skills for Care has predicted the UK may need an extra 480,000 workers in social care by 2035. Meanwhile, 430,000 carers could be lost in the next 10 years if those aged 55 and over take retirement.

They've had six months to resolve this dispute, but for six months they have refused to improve their 2% imposed pay rise, and failed to address our members' other issues of concern.

"They seem to think that if they ignore our members, they'll go away. But how can our members ignore the cost of living crisis when 40,000 civil servants are using food banks and 45,000 of them are claiming the benefits they administer themselves?"

"It's a national scandal and a stain on this government's reputation that so many of its own workforce are living in poverty."

The action proposed by Passport Office workers comes after months of strikes over pay in other sectors, such as rail, London Underground, schools, regional BBC journalism and universities.

On Thursday, unions representing healthcare workers in England agreed a final pay offer with the government, which, if accepted, is hoped will bring an end to strikes by nurses and ambulance workers.



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Johnson may be only witness to give evidence in Partygate hearing to MPs

Rowena Mason
Jessica Elgot

Boris Johnson may be the only witness called by the privileges committee for its investigation into whether he misled parliament over Partygate, with the inquiry rebuffing his lawyers' request to give evidence alongside him.

The former prime minister is preparing to appear at a televised hearing on Wednesday, with the length of the grilling depending on how much he says.

His counsel, David Pannick and Jason Pobjoy, had argued Johnson should be allowed legal representation, citing a precedent where lawyers had given evidence as witnesses on legal points.

"There is no good reason, in our opinion, why Mr Johnson should be denied the opportunity to have his counsel address the committee as a 'witness' on any issues of principle which arise," they said in a submission.

"The committee points out that ... Johnson is not facing a criminal trial. But he is, of course, facing very serious allegations and potentially severe penalties."

However, a spokesperson for the committee said: "The only witness invited to give evidence on 22 March is Mr Johnson. The committee has always been clear that witnesses may receive legal advice throughout the course of the inquiry and may have legal advisers present at any oral evidence session. However, legal advisers may not speak on behalf of the subject of the inquiry in oral evidence, and witnesses must address committees, which act on behalf of the House, themselves."

Johnson is also yet to take up an

► Boris Johnson and No 10 staff pictured in the Downing Street garden in May 2020, when lockdown restrictions on social mixing were in place

PHOTOGRAPH:
THE GUARDIAN



invitation from the committee to submit written evidence in relation to the inquiry, which is looking into whether he misled the Commons in telling MPs that "the guidance was followed and the rules were followed at all times" in Downing Street.

The committee could call other witnesses after the Wednesday hearing, but sources suggested the current trajectory was that Johnson may be the only person called to give evidence. Johnson's appearance will come after an interim report by the cross-party committee found significant evidence he misled MPs over lockdown parties, and that he and aides almost certainly knew at the time that they were breaking rules.

Government insiders feel frustrated that Johnson could be dominating the news agenda next week, reminding the public of the still very recent Partygate scandal. But they are resigned to his appearance

and will try to focus on other matters. "It's the Boris show. We want to distance ourselves from it so we're just going to crack on with everything else," one said.

There is no denying the hearing comes at an unwelcome moment for Rishi Sunak where the majority of Tory MPs are feeling very well disposed towards the prime minister, after a budget that did not produce a major adverse reaction and progress on ending strikes.

Sunak will also face a crunch vote on Wednesday on the so-called

**'It's the Boris show.
We want to distance
ourselves from it'**

Government
insider

After the exchange at PMQs, a senior aide to Johnson said saying his intervention was "scurrilous". Three days later, Johnson backtracked on the claim, saying he was referring to Starmer's leadership of the organisation at the time of the Savile decision rather than implying he was personally involved.

BBC sources said there had been communication from Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) urging them not to use the term "false", with points raised about Starmer taking credit for positive records from his time at the CPS. Sources at Sky and ITV said they were not aware of the same request.

A Conservative party spokesman said the requests were part of

Stormont brake, which is part of the Windsor framework on the Northern Ireland protocol negotiated by Sunak.

One official insisted there were "genuinely nomachiavellian tactics" on the timing of the vote, and that it had not been arranged to move the news agenda on from Johnson, but it does mean two problematic issues are dealt with on the same day.

For a significant number of MPs, there is a real fear that a return to Partygate and Johnson on the front pages would cause more damage.

Johnson is said to be in fighting spirit ahead of his appearance and this week was reselected as the Tory candidate for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, despite rumours he would seek a safer seat elsewhere. But the privileges committee verdict could be a considerable hurdle in his efforts to remain as an MP if they recommend a suspension and that triggers a recall petition and byelection.

normal media management and that conversations were professional and courteous. CCHQ did not consider them to amount to "pressure".

Despite the requests, the BBC did not change its language and continued to use "false" to describe the prime minister's comments, including on broadcast bulletins and in online stories, as well as in an analysis by the BBC's then political editor, Laura Kuenssberg.

A BBC spokesman said: "The BBC has reported on all aspects of this story - including the reaction of Boris Johnson to the treatment of Sir Keir Starmer by protesters, and criticism linking what happened to remarks made by the prime minister in the House of Commons."

Tory health committee chair faces 'NHS lobbying' investigation

Rowena Mason
Whitehall editor

The Conservative MP who chairs the Commons health and social care committee is under investigation over allegations he lobbied the NHS and ministers on behalf of a recruitment firm that employed him.

Steve Brine, a former health minister, was put under investigation by parliament's standards commissioner over "paid advocacy and declaration of an interest".

It comes after messages leaked to the Telegraph as part of its "lockdown files" investigation showed Brine had contacted the cabinet minister Michael Gove about an offer from the recruitment company Remedium to supply anaesthetists in early 2021.

The message said: "I have been trying for months to help the NHS through a company I am connected with - called Remedium. They have 50 anaesthetists right now who can be in the country and on the ground in the NHS if someone only said let us help. They just want to assist, and asked me how they might."

"Despite offering this to health and to Simon Stevens [the then head of NHS England], I've had nothing despite SS telling the press conference last week this is an acute problem, despite the PM telling the liaison committee this is his biggest problem, etc etc."

Gove passed the message on to Matt Hancock, the then health secretary, with further leaked WhatsApp messages showing that a special adviser in the health department said he was trying to help Brine and that the team were "sorting it".

"Steve's being a nob right now and I've no idea why. Been chasing my tail trying to sort loads of stuff for him (not least his hospital) and he still acts like this," the adviser told Hancock.

Brine was employed by Remedium as an ad hoc consultant paid £800 a day from September 2019 to February 2020; from July 2020 he began being paid £1,600 for eight hours' work each month, which continued until the end of December 2021.

MPs are not allowed to lobby for any organisation they are being paid by for six months after their last remuneration. It was a breach of this ban on paid lobbying that led to the resignation of Owen Paterson in 2021.

Of the messages, Brine told the Telegraph: "This was about responding in the national interest to an urgent public call from ministers and the NHS in a national crisis even if, ultimately, it led nowhere, let alone [to] secure any business for Remedium."

Brine was contacted for comment. Anneliese Dodds, the chair of the Labour party, referred the matter to the standards commissioner. She said the "public are rightly sick of this constant slew of Conservative sleaze".

Tories pressured BBC to avoid saying Johnson claim was 'false'

Jessica Elgot
Rowena Mason

The Conservative party put pressure on the BBC not to describe a claim by Boris Johnson that Keir Starmer failed to prosecute Jimmy Savile as "false", the Guardian has been told.

The allegation made by Johnson in February last year prompted fury, including from within his own party, and he eventually dropped the claim. However, behind the scenes,

Conservative party headquarters was pressing the BBC not to describe it as a "false" accusation. The BBC resisted the demand and continued to refer to it in those terms.

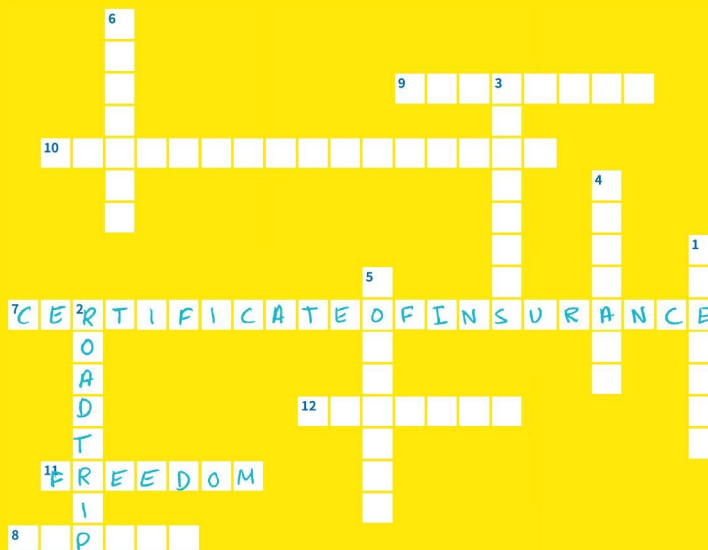
The furore erupted when Johnson accused the Labour leader of "failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile" for child sexual abuse more than a decade earlier when Starmer was head of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). An official CPS report confirmed there was no reference to involvement by Starmer in the decision.

PUZZLES

CROSSWORD

DOWN

- 1 The amount you pay for an insurance policy (1 word)
- 2 The name for a type of holiday where you travel from place to place in your car (2 words)
- 3 Where you pit stop to stretch your legs on a long car journey (1 word)
- 4 A strong concrete post, easy to miss while reversing (1 word)
- 5 The uneasy feeling of not knowing what to do (1 word)
- 6 The Aviva app where your insurance documents are stored (1 word)



ACROSS

- 7 The document which proves your car is insured (3 words)
- 8 To put something that is damaged, broken, or not working correctly, back into good condition (1 word)
- 9 To comfort someone and stop them from worrying (1 word)
- 10 The extra cover given by some insurers which allows you to use another vehicle (3 words)
- 11 That great feeling when you're back on the open road (1 word)
- 12 A famous road to get your kicks (2 words)

WORDSEARCH



ANNUITY

AUTOMATIC ENROLMENT

DEFINED BENEFIT

ANNUAL ALLOWANCE

~~PENSION POT~~

MYAVIVA

THANKFULLY

PUZZLES

SORTED

~~RELIEF~~

RESOLVED

SATISFYING

RETIREMENT

~~IT TAKES AVIVA~~

SAVINGS

RELAXED

TAKEN CARE OF

FEELGOOD

HAPPINESS

ORGANISED

Helping solve your financial puzzles?

It takes Aviva.

aviva.co.uk



Ann Summers boss who made sex shop chain a household name dies aged 62

Sarah Butler

Jacqueline Gold, the businesswoman whose Ann Summers retail chain embraced a new wave of sexual liberation to make shopping for vibrators and lingerie an everyday event on UK high streets, has died at the age of 62.

Her family said her death on Thursday evening after seven years of treatment for breast cancer had left them "utterly heartbroken".

Gold, who was executive chair of Ann Summers, turned the sex shop into a safe space for women and was a powerful advocate for women in business. She remained active throughout her illness and into her final hours – on Wednesday she led her regular Twitter chat to promote female entrepreneurs. She was recognised with a CBE in 2016 for services to entrepreneurship, women in business and social enterprise.

In 2015, Gold said: "I set out to empower women in the bedroom and now I want to empower women in the boardroom."

Her sister, Vanessa Gold, the chief executive of Ann Summers, said: "Jacqueline courageously battled stage 4 breast cancer for seven years and was an absolute warrior throughout her cancer journey. In life she was a trailblazer, a visionary and the most incredible woman, all of which makes this news that much harder to bear. As a family, we are utterly heartbroken at the loss of our wife, mum, sister and best friend."

Jacqueline Gold's death comes less than three months after that of her father, David, the joint chair of West Ham United. He died aged 86 after a short illness.

He had given her work experience at Ann Summers in 1979, when she was 19, having bought the four-store

sex shop business a few years earlier. Unimpressed by the men-only atmosphere, she went on to take the brand into women's homes, organising Tupperware-style selling parties, bringing vibrators into the sitting rooms of middle England and giving women a chance to earn their own money.

Gold became the chief executive of Ann Summers in 1987 and took it on to more than 100 high streets across the UK, turning women-friendly products such as the Rampant Rabbit vibrator into household names.

Her family said: "It is her vision and creativity that saw Ann Summers grow from an unknown brand to a British household name and staple of the British high street."

Gold said her time at Ann Summers was "an extremely colourful one" in which she "certainly faced my fair share of obstacles".

In the early days of the business, she was arrested at a trade exhibition for allegedly running a sex shop without a licence and was sent a bullet in the post when Ann Summers opened its first store in Ireland in 1999. Gold also took the government to court in 2003 – and won – after Ann Summers was banned from advertising in jobcentres. She spoke of the difficulties in negotiating a male-dominated business world where she had few women to look up to in her early years as a retail boss.

Her personal life also had its difficulties. In her autobiography *A Woman's Courage*, Gold wrote of being abused as a child by her mother's second husband and suffering from depression.

Later in life she struggled to have children, undergoing several rounds of IVF, and lost her son, Alfie, when he was eight months old to a rare brain condition. Then in 2011, the nanny of her daughter, Scarlett,

▼ Jacqueline Gold in 2005. She had become chief executive in 1987 and took the chain to 100 UK high streets

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY HALL/THE GUARDIAN



'I set out to empower women in the bedroom – and now in the boardroom'

Jacqueline Gold
Ex-Ann Summers CEO

admitted trying to poison Gold and was imprisoned.

Gold was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 2016. The cancer went into remission the following year but returned in 2019 and Gold went through three rounds of chemotherapy, sharing her experiences with others in the hope it would help them.

Kirsty Wark, who made the BBC documentary *Womanhood* with

Gold, said on Twitter: "Jacqueline was one of the loveliest people I have met. A kind, modest, positive woman who adored her family."

Deborah Meaden, the businesswoman best known for the BBC's *Dragons' Den* show, said Gold was "a visionary and trailblazer for women in business".

Gold is survived by her husband, Dan, and daughter Scarlett.

A new strand of conversations with friends 'An island of erotica, sandwiched between a Paperchase and a Costa'

When Jacqueline Gold arrived to shake up the Ann Summers business, it had already been in the family for a decade after being bought by her father, David, and uncle, Ralph Gold.

They had made the leap from sex shop to what they styled a "lingerie boutique"; it would be more accurate to say they took it from a shop that women never went into to a shop women did go into, while still selling the same thing – sex toys and lucky knickers.

Jacqueline Gold's impact went far beyond the shops or even the operation. The irony is that British culture in the 1980s was

hardly a stranger to photographs of women in their underwear, but these images were pretty well always used to sell random things to men.

The notion of erotic imagery and a shop frontage aimed at women was novel and freighted with innuendo. It was not cost-free for women to go browsing in Ann Summers, and Gold attacked this from two directions.

Firstly, she leaned into the smut and sought to wear it with pride, and this was the source of much of the controversy: a few advertising campaigns fell foul of ASA rulings for being too much for the high street. Other objections ran deeper

than obscenity: a blow-up doll, Mustafa Shag, was considered a provocation to Muslim groups.

There was never any attempt to make the store displays look discreet, and in the 80s and 90s they were quite incongruous. Regular sex shops don't get prime retail space. Mainstream underwear vendors such as M&S emphatically didn't go full red-lace-suspender in their window displays, so Ann Summers was a little island of erotica sandwiched between a Paperchase and a Costa, a window into a different world.

Secondly, recognising that there was a big untapped market of women who wanted the goods

but would rather not be seen in the shops, Gold created the Party Plan as soon as she arrived: basically, Tupperware parties except with sex toys and underwear.

By 2003 there were 4,000 parties a week in the UK. They were eventually halted, partly by the internet, partly by the growing realisation among party planners that it was quite hard to make a living. But the brand had more to gain from the worldwide wonder web than it lost: the year after it went online, it sold one million of its own-brand vibrators – the Rampant Rabbit – in the UK alone.

That sex-toy trajectory, where vibrators went from being a thing

women were too embarrassed to be caught shopping for to a thing women would give each other as a gift, is often put down to the Sex and the City effect, in particular one episode, *The Turtle* and *The Hare*, in which Miranda lends Charlotte her rabbit. But more influential in the UK was the grassroots effect: thousands of women a week, over two decades, talking about sex toys quite freely in a social setting.

It could have been started with second-wave feminist-consciousness-raising groups, but one doesn't get the sense they centred pleasure in quite the same way. *Zoe Williams*

Parasitic purple fungus that infects, takes over, then kills spiders discovered in Brazil's rainforest

Patrick Greenfield

Scientists believe they have discovered a new parasitic fungus that preys on trapdoor spiders in Brazil's Atlantic rainforest.

The organism, which is purple, belongs to a group of fungi that infect invertebrates and take over the host. A closeup image shows the fungus wrapped around a trapdoor spider, poking out of the burrow from which the arachnid grabs insects.

Researchers said there was no evidence that the new parasitic fungus controlled the behaviour of trapdoor spiders before killing them, like their zombie-ant fungi relatives.

Zombie-ant fungi overcome the insects and trick them into leaving their nests to go to places where they can spread their spores. They were made famous by the post-apocalyptic TV drama *The Last of Us*.

The fungus was found in November during a field trip to forests north of Rio de Janeiro to document the area's biodiversity and search for new species. It will need a formal scientific description before it is confirmed as a new species.

"It's a really beautiful thing," said Dr João Araújo, a Brazilian mycologist with the New York Botanical Garden, who made the discovery but has not

yet decided on a name. "They infect trapdoor spiders, and it's one of the very few cordyceps that are purple, which is a cool feature."

The Atlantic rainforest is one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. It once covered 15% of Brazil but has become highly fragmented, with only 20% of the original area now left. A biodiversity hotspot, it boasts several species that are found nowhere else on Earth, including the golden lion tamarin monkey and the painted tree rat.

The expedition, which was a collaboration between Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the New York and Rio botanical gardens and other organisations, included experts on plants, fungi, frogs, snakes and birds who wanted to see what remained in the forest.

Scientists used the latest portable technology to sequence the genome of the fungus on site.

They believe they made more discoveries of fungal parasites on the trip, but need to do more checks. They include a parasitic fungus that preys on a harvestman spider, and another that attacks dung beetles.

"The species that attacks trapdoor spiders belongs to a mega-diverse group of fungi," said Araújo.

"We know about 1% of its diversity, so we know very little about them. Foundational scientific work is needed so we can, perhaps, investigate new medical compounds or use them to protect against pests in crops."

The lead researcher, Dr Oscar Alejandro Pérez Escobar, and Dr Natalia Przelomska, who conducted in-the-field sequencing, said their work would back up the new species hypothesis and could be used to speed up identification of other species in threatened ecosystems.

The zombie fungus was made famous by post-apocalyptic TV show *The Last of Us*

New data links Covid's origins to raccoon dogs at Wuhan market

Ian Sample
Science editor

Newly released genetic data gathered from a live food market in Wuhan has linked Covid-19 with raccoon dogs, adding weight to the theory that infected animals sold at the site sparked the coronavirus pandemic, according to researchers involved in the work.

Swabs collected from stalls at the

Huanan seafood market in the two months after it was shut down on 1 January 2020 were previously found to contain Covid and human DNA. When the findings were published last year, Chinese researchers said the samples contained no animal DNA.

But that conclusion has now been overturned by an international team of scientists. Their analysis of gene sequences posted by the Chinese team to the scientific database GISAID found that some of the Covid-positive

samples were rich in DNA from raccoon dogs. Traces of DNA from other mammals including civets were also present in Covid-positive samples.

The discovery does not prove raccoon dogs or other animals infected with Covid triggered the pandemic, but scientists who presented the work to an expert group at the World Health Organization on Tuesday believe that it makes the scenario more likely.

"The data does point even further to a market origin," Prof Kristian Andersen, an evolutionary biologist at Scripps Research in La Jolla, California, told Science magazine.

Andersen attended the WHO's Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins

of Novel Pathogens meeting and is working on the data.

The recently uploaded gene sequences were originally spotted by Florence Débarre, an evolutionary biologist at the French National Centre for Scientific Research. She alerted Andersen and Prof Michael Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona. Both have written papers providing evidence for a market origin for the pandemic.

What sparked the worst pandemic in a century has become the focus of intense - and often toxic - debate. One theory proposes that the virus emerged in wild animals and spread to humans through contamination at the market. Another suspects that the

Scientists believe they have identified a new parasitic fungus that preys on trapdoor spiders

PHOTOGRAPH: JOÃO ARAÚJO



◀ A parasitic fungus preying on a harvestman spider in the Brazilian rainforest
PHOTOGRAPH: JOÃO ARAÚJO

▼ A scene from *The Last of Us*, which made zombie-ant fungi famous
PHOTOGRAPH: HBO/WARNER MEDIA



Creepier than crawlies How hosts are infected

Parasitic fungi that turn some insects into "zombies" are as nightmarish as they sound for their hosts. Little is still known about cordyceps, first recorded by naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace in Indonesia in 1859.

This genus of fungus preys on insects and uses their internal organs as food, before growing out of the exoskeleton in brightly coloured contortions.

Some species chemically disrupt their hosts' brains, such as *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, better known as zombie-ant fungus. After infecting the host, it moves ants into optimal positions to spread their spores, then kills them, although some experts believe this could be an act of self-sacrifice by the ant to save the colony.

Scientific records show this predator relationship between fungi and ants is at least 48m years old, and some ants even clean each other of spores to fight infection.

Scientists believe there are thousands more species of cordyceps in rainforests waiting to be found.

Patrick Greenfield

virus escaped from the nearby Wuhan Institute of Virology, where researchers work on similar pathogens.

The latest genetic data does not prove that raccoon dogs or other mammals were infected with Covid and spreading it at the market. If the animals were infected, they may have contracted the virus from infected humans.

However, the findings do point to the possibility that the trigger was an infected animal and, ultimately, the illegal wildlife trade.

While scientists expect the Covid origins debate to rumble on, the incident has raised questions over why the Chinese team did not release the genetic data earlier.

Feed peanut products to babies to cut risk of allergy, experts say

Nicola Davis

Science correspondent

Peanut products such as puffed snacks and peanut butter should be given to children from four to six months of age to reduce the risk of them developing a peanut allergy, experts have said.

Studies suggest the prevalence of peanut allergy has doubled in a decade among children in western countries. About one in 50 children in the UK have the condition, with about 13,000 infants developing a peanut allergy each year. The condition can be life-threatening and create a constant worry for parents and children who have to avoid exposure.

Now researchers say prevalence in the UK could fall by 77% if all babies were introduced to peanut products between four and six months of age. "You'd stop 10,000 infants each year

developing peanut allergy - [a] huge number and a real opportunity for preventive medicine," said Graham Roberts, a professor in paediatric allergy and respiratory medicine at the University of Southampton and a co-author of the analysis.

Gideon Lack, a professor of paediatric allergy at King's College London, and another author, said that while for many years countries including the UK had been advocating that parents avoid giving peanut products to young babies, and only introducing them gradually, the data now showed the importance of early introduction.

In fact the former advice could have contributed to the explosion in peanut allergy alongside other factors, such as an increase in eczema in children and greater exposure to peanuts in their environment through increased consumption by others. "We believe peanut allergy develops

by exposure to peanut products in the home through the skin," said Lack, noting children with eczema were at increased risk of peanut allergy, and the risk was higher the more severe their eczema.

However, the team said early introduction of peanut products should not be confined to children with the skin condition, as peanut allergy could also develop in children with no eczema.

The research, published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, is based on an analysis of two large studies, the Learning Early About Peanut Allergy (Leap) trial, and the Enquiring About Tolerance

2%

Proportion of children in the UK who have a peanut allergy, which can be a life-threatening condition

(Eat) trial. While both have previously shown the benefits of early introduction of peanut products to infants, questions remained, including the optimal age for introducing such foods.

The team say their analysis shows peanut allergy mostly develops in the first year of life, but after six months of age.

What is more, the impact of early introduction in preventing peanut allergy decreases as the age of first introduction rises - an effect particularly pronounced in infants with severe eczema and in children of non-white ethnicity.

The researchers say children with eczema should be introduced to peanut products from four months old, adding that if other infants were given peanut products from six months of age - a delay acknowledging the challenges of introducing foods - there could be a 77% reduction overall in peanut allergy in children.

Lack acknowledged there were barriers to achieving early introduction of peanut products in the UK. "Part of it is culture, part of it is fear, part of it is this dichotomous belief that a child is either exclusively breast-fed or eats solids, whereas the two can coexist," he said.

MPs vote to ban import of hunting trophies

Patrick Greenfield

MPs have voted to support a controversial ban on importing hunting trophies into the UK.

A private member's bill put forward by the Conservative MP Henry Smith and backed by the government received the support of parliament after years of divisive debate on the issue. MPs from across the political spectrum spoke in favour of the legislation before it passed.

The government says the law, which will now move for debate in the Lords, will strengthen the conservation of endangered species and has widespread support from the public. The ban was part of the 2019 Conservative election manifesto and follows a high-profile anti-trophy hunting campaign backed by celebrities including Ricky Gervais, Brian May, Ed Sheeran and Joanna Lumley.

But many scientists, environmentalists and African community leaders have said the law could inadvertently accelerate the loss of wildlife, and accused celebrity campaigners of "neocolonialism". They point to the contributions of regulated trophy hunting to the recovery of populations of black and white rhino in Namibia and South Africa, and the snow leopard in Tajikistan.

British hunters are not a large part of the trophy hunting industry and the ban is considered largely symbolic by conservationists.

Claire Bass of the Humane Society International-UK welcomed the vote. "We're delighted this extremely popular bill has passed its report stage and third reading."

But others expressed their disappointment. Maxi Pia Louis, a community leader from Namibia, said she was disappointed that the voices of Africans had not been heard. "Britain has ignored our numerous attempts to engage ... This bill will make African communities poorer for many years to come," she said.

A government spokesperson said: "Following our consultation and call for evidence, the concern at the thought of hunters bringing back trophies from endangered animals was very clear and this ban will further demonstrate the UK's leadership in driving global efforts to reverse biodiversity loss."



'Dogs are not the problem. It is the owners that are the problem'

Duncan Hutt
Conservation director

◀ Dog owners are being asked to protect wildlife by doing their duty during the breeding season

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL MARIOTT/REX

Owners urged to keep dogs on short leads at nature reserves

Patrick Greenfield

From scaring endangered birds on their nests to the mountain of excrement they produce each day, dogs with irresponsible owners are a growing problem in UK nature reserves, say conservationists, who are urging people to keep their pets on a short lead.

The Wildlife Trusts, which operate more than 2,300 nature reserves

across the country, say loose dogs are a leading cause of plant and animal disturbances in UK reserves and their waste carries diseases for wildlife, with evidence that the 3,000 tonnes of faeces and urine produced by dogs each day disturbs the balance of ecosystems at levels that would be illegal on farmland.

Owners of the UK's 13 million dogs are being encouraged to stick to paths and avoid walking groups of dogs in nature reserves this spring and summer to protect wildlife during the

breeding season. They are also being asked to clean up waste and, where possible, stop dogs jumping in ponds.

Attacks on livestock are a persistent problem in nature reserves, sometimes resulting in the death of cows, sheep and other animals that may be maintaining grassland ecosystems.

People are also reminded that dogs must be on leads no longer than 2 metres between 1 March and 31 July on open access land to protect ground-nesting birds, such as nightjays, willow warblers and meadow pipits. Oystercatchers and ringed plovers are also easy to disturb. If a dog is seen worrying livestock, the landowner can legally kill the dog.

Dozens of cases across the country of wildlife and livestock being

harmed by dogs have been documented by the Wildlife Trusts. In Little Woolden Moss, Salford, dogs chase away curlews, lapwings and little ringed plovers, sometimes killing chicks in their nest.

In Kent, there were at least eight dog attacks on Wildlife Trust staff and livestock, with 13 sheep killed. Dogs jumping in ponds can disturb wildlife, while their flea treatments pollute ponds and other waterways.

"Dogs are not the problem - it is the owners that are the problem," said Duncan Hutt, Northumberland Wildlife Trust's director of conservation, who has a cocker spaniel. "Whether it is through lack of knowledge or lack of care, their dogs come first before anything else, including wildlife."



▲ The law could accelerate the loss of wildlife, some critics say

Officer who struck dying footballer can keep job

Vikram Dodd

Police and crime correspondent

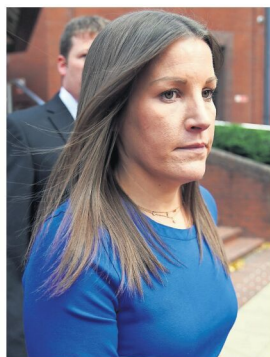
The police officer who repeatedly beat Dalian Atkinson as he lay dying has been found guilty of gross misconduct but allowed to keep her job.

The family of Atkinson, a former Aston Villa star, condemned the news that PC Mary Ellen Bettley-Smith of West Mercia police could now return to the streets as an officer, instead of being sacked.

The 33-year-old was on duty with former PC Benjamin Monk, her lover at the time, who was convicted of manslaughter for attacking Atkinson in 2016. He was jailed for eight years.

Monk tasered Atkinson for 33 seconds before kicking and stamping on his head with such force that his laces contained traces of Atkinson's blood and an imprint from them was left on his forehead.

After Atkinson, 48, fell to the



◀ PC Bettley-Smith leaves Birmingham crown court after her acquittal for assaulting the footballer Dalian Atkinson, right



ground, Bettley-Smith used excessive force by striking him three times with her baton, the panel found.

Bettley-Smith had been acquitted at a retrial of unlawfully assaulting Atkinson, having claimed she thought he might attack the officers, but still faced a gross misconduct hearing. The discipline panel gave her a final written warning.

In a statement, the footballer's relatives said: "Dalian Atkinson's family welcomes the panel's decision that the assault on Dalian as he was dying constitutes gross misconduct. However, as a probationary officer, having demonstrated such violence and poor judgment, it is very concerning that she was not dismissed immediately

this afternoon and that she will be put back on the streets as a serving police officer. This brings the police service into deeper disrepute."

Monk was the first British police officer in more than three decades to be convicted of manslaughter in the course of his duties.

Alex Murray, deputy chief constable of the West Mercia force, said: "The gross misconduct hearing into the level of force used by PC Bettley-Smith was chaired by an independent, legally qualified chair, with the panel consisting of representatives from outside the force.

"The facts of the case were presented, and PC Bettley-Smith was given the opportunity to explain her actions. This follows the national procedure.

"On the night Dalian died, police were called to protect him, his family and the public, but that did not happen. As a result, PC Ben Monk is in prison."

Lawyer accuses Labour party of failing to address racism 'hierarchy'

Aletha Adu

Political correspondent

Labour has been accused of being seen to take antisemitism more seriously than anti-black racism and Islamophobia by the lawyer who produced a report on the party's culture.

Martin Forde KC, who was commissioned to investigate allegations of bullying, racism and sexism, expressed concern about the party enabling a "hierarchy" of racism.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, the lawyer expressed concerns that the party under its current leadership had still not fully engaged with claims that anti-black racism was not taken as seriously as antisemitism.

Last summer Forde's 860-page report accused Labour of "in effect operating a hierarchy of discrimination". A Labour spokesperson said it described "a party out of control".

Forde made 165 recommendations, many of which the party now insists it has implemented. But Forde claims

the party's lack of debate over its findings signals wider issues.

In the interview, Forde said: "Anti-black racism and Islamophobia are not taken as seriously as antisemitism within the Labour party - that's the perception that has come through."

He expressed shock that no one from Labour had engaged with him to discuss his recommendations: "These are serious debates that need to be had in a respectful context and I just feel there's work to be done."

The former shadow chancellor John McDonnell said Labour members would find Forde's accusations "deeply worrying and will want a serious response from all those holding leading positions in the party".

A Labour spokesperson said: "We are grateful to Mr Forde for his work producing the report. Many of the recommendations contained in the report have already been implemented and our work continues.

"With Keir Starmer's leadership, Labour has changed, and real progress has been achieved."

"These are serious debates ... I feel there's work to be done"

Martin Forde KC

Author of Labour report

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'I shall not be obliged to dismiss Nanny': Jane Austen's letter to sister goes on display

Sarah Shaffi

A letter from Jane Austen to her sister, in which she shares domestic news and neighbourhood gossip, is to go on display at the author's former home.

Dated 1798, the letter is one of around 160 by Austen that survive, and is one of the earliest in existence. It came to Cheffins auctioneers through the estate of a Cambridge resident who acquired it in 2000.

Consisting of four pages, written on a single large folio sheet folded three times, the letter will be displayed at Jane Austen's House in Chawton, Hampshire, where she lived for the last eight years of her life. It will be part of an exhibition, *My Dear Cassandra*, running from 22 March to 29 October, which explores Austen's relationship with her sister.

Martin Millard, the director of Cheffins, says the letter is "typical in its domestic style: it is lively, vivid,



PHOTOGRAPH BY JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE

funny and a brilliant window into her [Austen's] personality".

The *Pride and Prejudice* author wrote the letter from Steventon, her family home at the time, to her sister, Cassandra, who was staying with their brother Edward Austen Knight

at Godmersham Park in Kent in October 1798. It was written the day after Austen's return from Kent where she, her parents and Cassandra had spent two months visiting Edward.

At the time of the letter, Austen's mother was ill, leaving her in charge



◀ The letter, dated 1798, and (above) Cassandra's portrait of Jane Austen

of the household. In the letter, Austen writes about her new responsibilities with mocking self-importance: "I am very grand indeed; I had the dignity of dropping out my mother's Laudanum last night, I carry about the keys of the Wine & Closet; twice since

I began this letter, have had orders to give in the kitchen: Our dinner was very good yesterday ... therefore I shall not be obliged to dismiss Nanny on that account."

Austen also tells her sister that their laundry lady is leaving and a new servant "undertakes our purification". "She does not look as if anything she touched would ever be clean, but who knows?" she writes.

The author also tells Cassandra about some local news, including that "Mrs Hall of Sherbourn was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright".

Austen ends the sad tale with the wry comment: "I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband ..."

She also shares her plans to "begin operations on my hat, on which You know my principal hopes of happiness depend".

Jane Austen's House acquired the letter through the acceptance in lieu scheme, administered by Arts Council England and negotiated by Cheffins, to settle a £140,000 tax bill.

The scheme allows those who have a liability to inheritance tax or one of its earlier incarnations to pay the bill by transferring important cultural, scientific or historic objects and archives to the nation.

Jurassic Park star Sam Neill reveals he is being treated for cancer

Lucy Clark

The actor Sam Neill has revealed he is being treated for stage-three blood cancer in a candid memoir to be released on Tuesday.

In an interview with the *Guardian* about his book, *Did I Ever Tell You This?* the 75-year-old Jurassic Park star discusses his career, life on his New Zealand farm, and mortality, having opened his book with a shock:

"The thing is, I'm crook. Possibly dying," he writes in chapter one. "I may have to speed this up."

He tells the *Guardian*: "I'm not afraid to die, but it would annoy me because I'd really like another decade or two, you know?"

"We've built all these lovely terraces, we've got these olive trees and cypresses, and I want to be around to see it all mature. And I've got my lovely little grandchildren. I want to see them get big. But as for the dying? I couldn't care less."

Neill began writing vignettes from his life as a way to keep busy while undergoing treatment last year.

"I found myself with nothing to do," he said. "And I'm used to working. I love working."

"Love being with people every day and enjoying human company and friendship and all these things. And suddenly I was deprived of that. And I thought: 'What am I going to do?'"



PHOTOGRAPH BY JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE

'I never had any intention to write a book. But as I went on and kept writing I realised it was giving me a reason to live'

"I never had any intention to write a book. But as I went on and kept writing I realised it was actually sort of giving me a reason to live, and I would go to bed thinking: 'I'll write about that tomorrow ... that will entertain me.' And so it was a lifesaver, really."

Neill reveals himself to be an enormously good raconteur, with a

collection of stories that takes the reader from his first seven years in Ireland to growing up in New Zealand, and funny anecdotes from film sets over the years.

On his farm, he talks of his animals, named after actors. There's Laura Dern (chicken), Michael Fassbender (rooster), Kylie Minogue (duck) and Helena Bonham Carter (cow).

He said his book is not a cancer memoir but rather that his illness forms a "spiral thread" throughout the narrative.

He first experienced swollen glands while doing publicity for Jurassic Park World Dominion in March last year and was soon diagnosed with angioimmunoblastic T-cell lymphoma. He received chemotherapy, but when that started to

fail he embarked on a new chemotherapy drug, which he will continue to receive monthly for the rest of his life, although he is now cancer free.

"I can't pretend that the last year hasn't had its dark moments," he said. "But those dark moments throw the light into sharp relief, you know, and have made me grateful for every day and immensely grateful for all my friends. Just pleased to be alive."

Neill, whose acting career began in the 1970s and includes more than 150 roles - from *My Brilliant Career* to *The Piano* and *Peaky Blinders* - is preparing to begin filming on the television adaptation of Liane Moriarty's bestselling novel *Apples Never Fall*, co-starring Annette Bening.

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Export ban put on Coleridge poem railing against slavery

Esther Addley

A manuscript containing a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge railing against the slave trade has been temporarily barred from leaving the UK, in the hope a British buyer is found.

The poem, written in Greek by Coleridge across six mottled pages, attacks the horrors of slavery and condemns those who overlooked the conditions of enslaved people being transported in the late 18th century.

Because of what it reveals about Coleridge and the slavery debate, it is a national treasure and too important to leave the country, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was advised. A decision on granting an export licence was deferred until at least 16 May to allow time for a British person or institution to raise the recommended £20,400 sale price.

Coleridge wrote the ode in 24 quatrains, in June 1792 when he was 19 and a Cambridge undergraduate, winning the university's Browne medal for classical composition. In it he writes: "I grieve deeply / with the race of slaves suffering dire ills / just as they groan with unspeakable grief". To those who "revel in the evils of Slavery [and] feed on the persecutions of the wretched" he writes, "Do you hear? Or do you not hear?"

Slavery was not abolished in the British empire until 1807, and enslaved people in the colonies were not freed until 1838.

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Lineker's other boots How Blundstones became the hit footwear of the moment

Ellie Violet Bramley

Your job is up in the air, there's a hoard of photographers outside the front door and the dog needs a walk, what's your next step?

For Gary Lineker there was only one option last Sunday: pull on some sturdy footwear and jostle your way through the cameras into the peace of a nearby field.

In many ways it was the classic celebrity walk of defiance, but one feature of Lineker's look lent it some extra star quality, and not the for the first time in his career, it was the former England striker's boots that caught the eye.

Lineker appeared to be wearing a pair of boots by Blundstone, a company founded in Tasmania in 1870 that supplied Aussie troops in the world wars. Made with the rugged terrain of the Australian island in mind, they have been adapted for troops in the jungle and were worn by mountaineers climbing Everest in the 1970s.

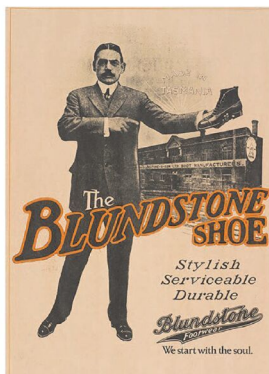
Also worn by Kate Middleton, David Beckham, Iggy Pop and Brad Pitt, and a favourite with farmers and fashion editors, the understated Blundstone boot is, a little like Lineker, having a moment of unexpected attention.

That rare item that unites a broad range of people who would usually eschew footwear twinning, Blundstones, or "Blunnies" as they are known, have become a sleeper hit. A recent New York Times article suggested that what Timberlands were to the 1990s and Uggs were to the early 2000s, the Blundstone may be to the early 2020s; a marker of where we are as society.

Over the past three years searches have risen 117% on shopping platform site Lyst, with the greatest number of searches coming from people in their late 30s. The brand itself reports 100% growth in UK sales since 2019. Stealthily, given their unassuming



▲ Gary Lineker facing the press last week as he took his dog, Filbert, out for a walk PHOTOGRAPH: NEIL HALL/EPA



▲ The Australian heritage brand established in 1870 has become a sleeper hit with 100% growth since 2019 in UK sales, Blundstone reports

aesthetic, they have become ubiquitous on high streets and fields across the country.

Firmly unisex, women are the drivers in the growth of the brand. "In most markets, the 24-35-year-old female segment is showing the fastest growth for both awareness and purchasing behaviour of our brand," said Blundstone's joint chief executive Adam Blake.

While the company has been around for more than a century, the trend forecasting company WGSN named it a brand to watch in 2021. Lorna Hall, WGSN's director of fashion intelligence, said: "Its core positioning as a heritage brand with its roots in functionality meant it was well placed to reap the benefits of the great outdoors trend that saw people putting their money into gear that could be worn on gentle hikes and in town."



Their unfussiness fits with a broader pandemic-related mood for gardening, fresh air, mud, growing vegetables, throwing pottery and bread baking. "The Blundstone boot is an undoubtedly handsome, sensible shoe," said Esquire's style director, Charlie Teasdale, who recently located the boots within

a look he calls "allotmentcore", or dressing like Monty Don.

"But I would wager that many people wear them because of what they suggest: that the wearer lives at a slower pace of life than those in the rat race; that they are unburdened by the pressure of trends, and that they are into crafts and artisanal goods." They are, he said, "kind of the official shoe of post-pandemic mindfulness".

For Teasdale, who got his first pair - "the classic shape in mottled brown" - five years ago, Blundstones represent this aspirational style of country living even for those, like him, who live inside the M25. Blundstones, he explained, appeal for their cultural cache - they "have become a marker of supposed taste, like Aesop handwash or an LRB tote bag." In this post-logomania era, their lack of showiness fits the mood; what logos they do have are subtly embossed on the soles and their straps.

But they aren't just popular with aspirational good lifers; urban dog owners or the frequenters of farmers' markets. "They're a bit of a uniform around these parts," said Susan Kinsey-Jones, who said she and her husband, who run a natural wine vineyard in a remote part of Wales, wear them more than any other footwear.

There are of course other boots that tick a similar box, such as the Hunter ankle boot welly, which is a very similar shape and style. There have been high fashion examples, too - in 2019 the footballer and style icon Hector Bellerin attended the Emirates stadium wearing an aesthetically similar pair by Prada known as the Brixen boot.

The popularity of such work-a-day footwear is in line with strong sales in casual footwear in general. According to the industry publication Drapers, customers are prioritising comfort and functionality over formalwear.

For Kinsey-Jones, their ease of gliding on and off is a significant part of their appeal. "We have two small children, which means there's no time to mess around with fiddly laces." This, according to Hall, should not be "dismissed lightly. Subtle pandemic influences on people's product choices persist and doing up laces is now a step too far. It seems an unnecessary activity after wearing slippers and clogs for more than a year."

Trousers get cut as women pick suits with shorts for the office

Chloe MacDonnell

First John Lewis cancelled the floral dress. Now M&S is targeting trousers. Unveiling its latest womenswear collection this week, the retailer snubbed the traditional two-piece suit. In place of the expected tailored trousers, there were shorts.

These are not the short shorts Gen Z favours at summer festivals - M&S's versions are more of a bermuda

style. Cut loose, they fall just above the knee. They come with matching blazers, also slightly oversized with structured shoulders and longer length hems in a variety of colours and materials including wool blends and pure linens.

M&S said it was focusing on the style in response to shoppers demanding a new type of workwear. With hybrid working becoming more popular, customers want to buy clothing to reflect that.

A coordinated short suit is smart

enough to wear to the office on hot days but not too formal for working from home or going to the pub.

Separates also appeal to customers who have become more cautious about spending because of the cost of living crisis. The blazer and shorts can be mixed and matched with existing pieces in wardrobes.

The temperature in the UK is hovering around 10C but sales at M&S are already up. The retailer said that 80% of its jackets would come with a matching shorts option. Tomato red and jade green are already proving to be popular colours.

It is a styling combination first seen on the catwalks. At Chanel, bouclé tweed skirt suits were replaced by bermuda shorts while at Jil Sander



▲ Loose shorts with matching blazer

longer length shorts were paired with sandals and flat knee-high boots.

Other high street retailers are joining the trend. Reiss's white shorts featuring pressed creases and a matching blazer are already bestsellers. Cos is selling relaxed bermuda shorts with front pleats in sandy beiges and bright greens with matching blazers. Jigsaw's chocolate brown twill outfit is so popular it is introducing pinstripe and pink herringbone linen versions.

For a recent awards lunch the actor Viola Davis wore a sky-blue set from the American brand Lafayette 148, while Michelle Yeoh, who won her first Oscar earlier this week, was pictured wearing a pastel pink outfit from Off-White.

'Deer are destroying habitats': new push to eat more venison

Amelia Hill

"It's crazy and indefensible," the MP Charles Walker says. "Venison is a wonderful, sustainable resource but is seen as too posh to eat. Ergo, very few people eat it and it ends up being made into dog food. It's a contradiction of mind-bending proportions."

From ancient Celtic folklore and Arthurian romance to the Harry Potter films and Warcraft games, it is the stag that is conjured up to symbolise the spirit of ancient England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

But now conservationists, environmentalists and farmers have come together to warn that Milton's "Behemoth, biggest born of earth" is destroying the countryside as it has come to represent.

Thanks to a two-year pause in culling during the pandemic the deer population is at its highest level for 1,000 years; at about 2 million animals – 50 years ago the population was at 450,000. These herds are

growing exponentially: at the current rate there will be almost 2.4 million deer in the UK by the end of the year.

"It has no natural predators any more," said Jim Lee, the lead wildlife manager of Forestry England. "Bears, wolves and lynxes are long gone. Control through culling is the only plausible answer, otherwise deer destroy the habitats of our native flora and fauna and the ability of trees and soils to capture carbon from the atmosphere."

Given the speed with which deer breed, at least 750,000 animals need to be killed this year just to stop this enormous population increasing further. Thanks to post-Brexit complications in exporting the meat, however, and the lack of a UK market for venison, only 350,000 animals are currently killed each year.

At the same time, a growing number of families hit by the cost of living crisis are crying out for healthy food, particularly from protein-rich food groups including meat.

There are more food banks across the UK than ever before. But while



▲ The Country Food Trust is to supply venison ragu to food banks

demand has soared donations have plummeted – in some cases by up to 70%. Protein-rich foods donations in particular have become a scarcity.

A pilot scheme is aiming to help solve all these urgent issues at the same time: Forestry England, Farm Wilder and The Country Food Trust, of which Walker, the Tory MP for Broxbourne, is chair, are determined to get wild venison on to dinner plates across the country. Increasing demand, he says, will enable more animals to be killed – and give the countryside a chance to recover.

To increase demand in a resistant market, the three organisations have created a pipeline funneling protein-rich, low-fat, low-cholesterol venison meals to food banks, schools, hospitals, the armed forces and prisons across the country.

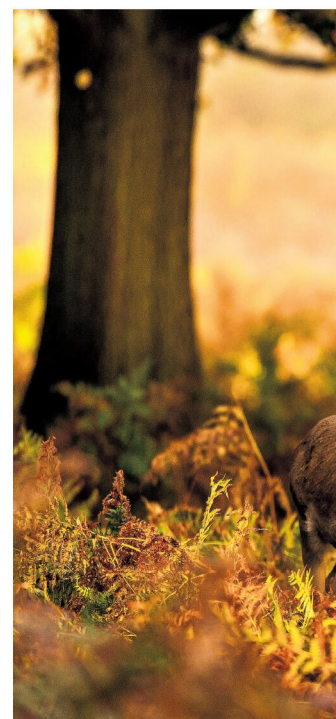
The pilot is starting with food banks: Forestry England will supply 5 tonnes of wild venison from forests in Devon and Cornwall to Farm Wilder this year. It will process the venison into ragu and the Country Food Trust will distribute it.

"These meals have literally been a lifesaver," says Gill Bates, the manager of the Bexley food bank in Erith. "Demand from families is up by 150%, but we often have no protein in stock at all. This is a problem because from a health point of view proteins are the building blocks of life, far more so than the white carbohydrates we get donated in far greater bulk."

By the end of the year, 1 million visitors to food banks will have dined on wild venison ragu. And that is just the pilot: the aim now is to roll out the scheme nationally.

SJ Hunt, the chief executive of the Country Food Trust, has been told to expect a call from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs shortly to set up a meeting.

"I'm hoping they're going to agree to scale us up," she says. "Then we can really address the food poverty issue right across the country."



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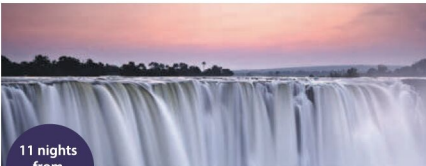
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▼ The UK deer population has been growing rapidly thanks to a two-year pause in culling during the pandemic
PHOTOGRAPH: MARK BRIDGER/GETTY IMAGES



2m

The estimated wild deer population in the UK, which is now at the highest level in 1,000 years

5

The number of tonnes of wild venison from forests in Devon and Cornwall to be supplied to Farm Wilder this year

Seven authors on all-women shortlist for Carnegie medal

Sarah Shaffi

Authors including Jessie Burton, Patrice Lawrence and Sita Brahmachari are on an all-female shortlist for the Carnegie medal for writing.

The prize recognises outstanding achievement in children's writing and features seven authors. Burton, Lawrence and Brahmachari are all first-timers on the list, as is Manon Steffan Ros. The list is completed by Katya Balen, who won the award in 2022, Louise Finch and Ruta Sepetys.

The nominees, said the chair of judges, Janet Noble, show that "stories of bravery, compassion and community are told authentically and sensitively in a range of distinctive written and illustrative styles".

On the writing shortlist, Burton - best known for adult novels including *The Miniaturist* - is shortlisted for *Medusa*, a retelling of the story of the Gorgon from Greek mythology, illustrated by Olivia Lomenech Gill.

Lawrence is shortlisted for *Needle*, which explores the criminal justice system for young people through the story of Charlene, a knitter who stabs her foster mum's son when he destroys her latest creation.

Brahmachari's *When Shadows Fall*, illustrated by Natalie Sirett, is about a teenager struck by tragedy, and his friends' efforts to save him.

Steffan Ros's *The Blue Book of Nebo* was originally published in Welsh, and is set in a dystopian version of Wales where technology has disappeared, and people must survive returning to old ways of living.

Balen's *The Light in Everything* is a story about blended families. Finch's *The Eternal Return of Clara Hart* follows a boy who keeps experiencing the same 24 hours after seeing a classmate die in what looks like a tragic accident at a house party.

I Must Betray You by Sepetys is based on the real events of the Romanian revolution of 1989 and is about a teenager who has grown up in a repressive dictatorship.

The winner will be announced on 21 June at a ceremony hosted by the former children's laureate Lauren Child. She will receive £500 worth of books to donate to a library of her choice, a golden medal and the £5,000 Colin Mears award cash prize.

The winner of the Carnegie medal for illustration, from a shortlist of six, will be announced the same day.



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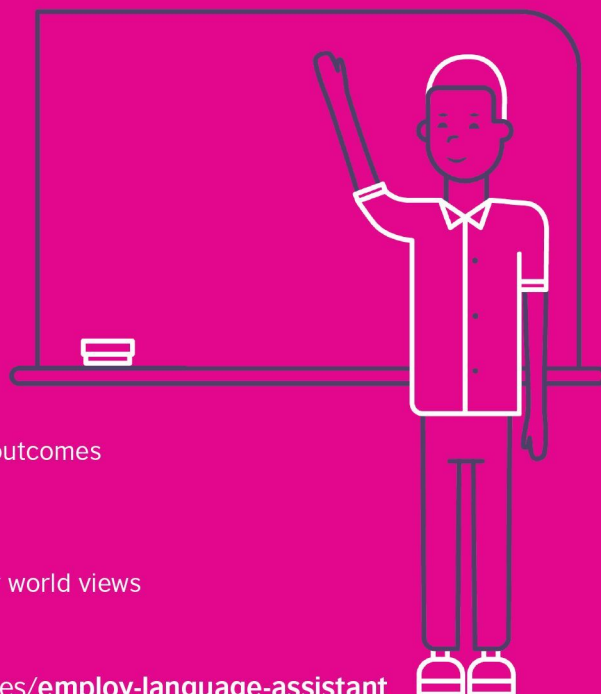
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New inquest into death of woman who wrongly had her benefits cut off

Patrick Butler

Social policy editor

The mother of Jodey Whiting, a seriously mentally ill and disabled woman who killed herself after her benefits were wrongly cut off, has won an appeal for a fresh inquest into her daughter's death.

Whiting, from Stockton-on-Tees, took her own life in 2017. Days earlier, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) officials had stopped her benefits after she missed a fit-for-work test appointment.

Her mother, Joy Dove, argued that the original 37-minute inquest, where she had no legal representation, was inadequate and that a second inquest was needed to fully examine the "multiple, significant failings" by the DWP and its possible role in her death.

After yesterday's ruling, Dove said: "We buried Jodey just over six years ago and finally my family and I

have the chance of getting justice for Jodey. Jodey is never going to be forgotten and her death was not in vain: she's helping others and her legacy will live on.

"We have always believed that the DWP wrongly stopping Jodey's benefits caused her death... This is a victory not just for us but for all those families and others still on the receiving end of awful treatment by the DWP. I hope the DWP learn from their tragic failings."

The judge Lady Justice Whipple said in yesterday's ruling that a new inquest was "desirable in the interests of justice". She said the public had a legitimate interest in knowing whether Whiting's death was linked to the abrupt stopping of her benefits.

A key factor in the ruling was fresh evidence provided by a psychiatrist, Dr Trevor Turner, who said Whiting would have "experienced shock and distress at the withdrawal of her welfare benefits and that the effect would have been heightened by her



▼ Joy Dove, whose daughter Jodey Whiting killed herself in 2017, at the Royal Courts of Justice in London

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM PILGRIM/PA

current difficulties, her isolation and her pain."

The judgment found it was appropriate to hold a new inquest to establish whether there was "any link or connection between the withdrawal of the welfare benefits and her mental state in the period leading up to Jodey's death".

Dove's solicitor, Merry Varney of Leigh Day, said: "Today's unanimous ruling from the court of appeal means finally Joy and her family have the opportunity for the role of shocking failings by the DWP in the death of much-loved Jodey to be publicly

investigated." Whiting's death was one of a number of high-profile tragedies in recent years that drew attention to mishandling of vulnerable claimants by DWP officials. A National Audit Office inquiry in 2020 found at least 69 cases between 2014 and 2020 where suicides could have been linked to problems with benefit claims.

The DWP subsequently vowed to overhaul its safeguarding guidelines so that it provided support to vulnerable claimants rather than simply withdrawing their benefits. The DWP's permanent secretary, Peter

Schofield, said at the time: "We genuinely want to listen and learn."

A government spokesperson said after yesterday's ruling: "Our sincere condolences remain with Ms Whiting's family. DWP is ready to assist the new coroner with their investigation. We cannot comment on active legal proceedings."

Whiting, whose DWP file had a red flag to alert staff to her mental health problems, had been ill with pneumonia and receiving hospital treatment for a brain cyst when she failed to open a letter from the DWP in February 2017 calling her in for a work capability assessment. When she did not attend the appointment, benefits officials automatically withdrew her employment and support allowance payments for breaching her benefit conditions. This in turn triggered the stopping of her housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Although Citizens Advice wrote to the DWP on her behalf to explain her situation and request another assessment, benefits officials said they did not receive the letter. Her body was found by her mother six days later.

A 2019 review of the case by an independent complaints body found the DWP guilty of five serious failings in its handling of the case. It found officials had in effect ignored Whiting's poor health and circumstances, and it ordered the DWP to pay £10,000 damages.

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Television review

Elvis series that'll have parents all shook up

Agent Elvis

Netflix

★★★★☆

Leila Latif

In some ways it's surprising that Agent Elvis, a show where Elvis Presley is a secret agent saving the world between Las Vegas concerts with a plucky chimp sidekick, didn't already exist. Throughout his career, Elvis's image was commodified and it is easy to picture as a cartoon playing on Saturday mornings between Superman and Josie and the Pussycats to wide-eyed American children. But Netflix's Agent Elvis is extremely child-unfriendly.

This is a show where hot tubs are blocked by an excess of "monkey

spunk", Elvis's surrogate mother has a friends-with-benefits situation with William Shatner and jars of Howard Hughes's piss line the walls of Elvis's spy plane.

While it takes a little getting used to, it's easy to stay transfixed by the gorgeously bright and sharp animation, which shines most in the action scenes when Elvis breaks out his karate moves.

Matthew McConaughey voices Elvis with his regular Texas drawl. He's just as foul-mouthed as the rest of the cast but is more of a straight man than his unhinged acquaintances. His motives are spelt out while torturing a criminal in the first episode alongside his trusty ape companion Scatter: "I decided a while ago I wasn't gonna just sit around while this country's torn apart by all the chaos, the dirtbag hippies, the drugs, the crime." Those pure motives aren't held by everyone on the mission,



▼ Matthew McConaughey voices Elvis, who has a sadistic chimpanzee called Scatter as his trusty sidekick

PHOTOGRAPH: NETFLIX

though, we find out. "My chimp Scatter here - he just does it because he gets off to it."

Sadistic chimp aside, Elvis's crew is rounded out by Kaitlin Olson as CeCe Ryder, a hedonistic operative for The Central Bureau. Johnny Knoxville plays Elvis's dim-witted best friend Bobby Ray, Niecy Nash is Bertie - Elvis's "rock" who has cared for him since

he was a baby - and Don Cheadle is the Commander who runs the bureau.

The hit rate of jokes is inconsistent but the frequency of punchlines means even if only one in three gets a giggle, it still works out as well over a laugh a minute.

Despite the scenes of Elvis tripping on LSD or pummeling bad guys to death, this series comes

with family approval, having been created by Priscilla Presley, who also voices herself. The show takes gentle jabs at Elvis's status as an icon and builds up some intriguing mysteries and fun twists.

But perhaps the funniest image is of the hundreds of unsuspecting parents who will probably be wrongfooted by the surprising direction this series takes.

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Parents of girl killed in speedboat crash angry over suspended jail term

Steven Morris
Agencies

The family of a 15-year-old girl who was killed in a speedboat crash have described the moment her life support system was turned off and criticised the skipper as a "coward" as he was given a suspended prison sentence.

Emily Lewis suffered fatal injuries after the rigid inflatable boat (Rib) collided with a 4.5-metre buoy at 42mph in Southampton Water, with a number of other passengers left seriously injured.

Michael Lawrence, 55, who was driving the boat, was found not guilty of manslaughter by gross negligence but convicted of failing to maintain a proper lookout and to proceed at a safe speed.

Michael Howley, 52, the owner of Seadogz, the company that ran the boat trips, was convicted of not operating the vessel safely.

They were sentenced at Winchester crown court yesterday to 18 weeks in custody suspended for two years, ordered to complete 125 hours of community service, and pay £1,000 of court costs.

The judge, Mr Justice Butcher, said: "It is still unknown exactly why you, Michael Lawrence, drove the Rib as you did. I am sure the accident was not caused by your deliberately driving at the buoy or aiming to go close and swerve away. Instead, what happened must have been the result of inattention or distraction."

Christine Agnew KC, prosecuting, told the trial that Emily's parents, Simon and Nicola, had taken their daughters Emily and Amy for the "high thrills" speedboat ride on 22 August 2020. The Rib sped directly at the buoy for 14 seconds before hitting it, throwing two passengers into the water and injuring several others.

Lawrence told the trial he had lost his vision momentarily before hitting the buoy.



▲ Emily Lewis, 15, was killed when a boat driven by Michael Lawrence crashed in Southampton Water

PHOTOGRAPH: HAMPSHIRE POLICE/PA

'You are a coward, only thinking about yourself. You show no remorse'

Nicola Lewis
Emily Lewis's mother

Reading her victim impact statement to the court, Emily's mother, Nicola Lewis, wiped back tears and looked at Lawrence as she said: "You have taken away from us being able to see Emily grow into the beautiful young lady, the amazing adult that she would have been. I will never forgive you for this."

"I go back to that day, all I can see is Emily's blue lips and her saying to me she cannot breathe. I was not able to hold her and comfort her because of my other injuries. I couldn't help her, and this haunts me daily."

"It is two and a half years, and you

have kept us in this hell. You could have taken responsibility for what happened that day, but you have chosen not to. To me, you are just a coward, only thinking about yourself. You show no remorse."

Emily's father, Simon Lewis, told him: "I can vividly see her skin, smooth and pale as alabaster, and her lips already looking blue. I hope you remember this, too. I hope this is what you see in your mind's eye when you wake up and before you sleep."

Mark Ashley, defending Lawrence, of Blackfield in Hampshire, said his client's actions were "out of character", adding: "We are dealing with a good man who has made a mistake."

Keely Harvey, representing Howley, of Hordle in Hampshire, said he "cared" about the safety of his passengers, and added: "He is highly remorseful, he is a man who will be forever affected by this."

Outside court, Simon Lewis said: "The suspended sentence is quite hard to accept. Neither Mr Lawrence nor Mr Howley have apologised for what happened on that fateful day. I found this to be highly disrespectful not only to the survivors of the collision but also to Emily."

Nicola Lewis was also critical of how offences involving boats are dealt with, saying there was a disparity between the charges Lawrence and Howley might have faced had the incident occurred on a road.

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Steep rise in people going to Turkey for weight-loss surgery

Hannah Devlin

Science correspondent

Desperate patients are seeking risky weight loss treatments in Turkey because of unacceptable NHS waiting times, a leading surgeon has warned.

Ahmed Ahmed, a consultant bariatric surgeon at Imperial College healthcare trust and treasurer of the British Obesity and Metabolic Surgery Society, said there had been a notable increase in patients presenting with complications after surgery abroad. "There's certainly an increase in people going abroad for surgery and having bariatric surgery in Turkey," he said. "Since Covid, and the ever-increasing waiting lists in the NHS, people are being forced to go abroad to seek treatment. People should not have to go abroad."

Concerns were raised after the EU warned citizens against travelling to Turkey for "weight loss" Botox injections after 67 of cases of botulism poisoning in three weeks linked to private clinics in Istanbul and İzmir.

A European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control alert said some patients had been admitted to intensive care. None of the cases highlighted were in the UK and the UK regulator, the MHRA, has not received any reports of botulism linked to weight loss treatments.

Gastric botox injections are advertised as a way to relax the stomach muscles, with the aim of reducing appetite and helping people lose weight.

The treatment is offered as a cheap, less invasive alternative to gastric surgery, but, according to Ahmed, is unlikely to be effective. "There is no evidence that gastric Botox injections work at all," he said, adding that the treatment was not offered on the NHS for this reason. "Anybody who practices evidence-based medicine wouldn't be doing this."

Ahmed also described patients who had sought surgery abroad, but subsequently needed NHS treatment because of serious complications.

"I work at St Mary's hospital, in Paddington and I've had people

'People have come straight to my A&E department after surgery in Turkey'

Ahmed Ahmed
Bariatric surgeon

coming straight on the Heathrow Express to my A&E department after surgery in Turkey," he said.

"I've seen people are being told they were having one operation, but when we've investigated they've had another procedure. I've seen internal leaks or narrowing, joins not being done properly. I'm not saying that all Turkish bariatric surgery is bad, but I can tell you that I've seen a higher than expected rate of complications from people who've flown abroad to get it," he added.

According to the Foreign Office, at least 22 UK citizens have died during medical tourism trips to Turkey,

with several publicised cases involving bariatric surgery.

Dawn Knight, a patient safety campaigner and trustee of the Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners, said some clinics were engaged in aggressive marketing in the UK, offering treatments ranging from hair restoration to dental operations, gastric sleeves and liposuction.

"These clinics are preying on the very vulnerable by offering a fast-track route, but the risks are exponentially higher than being under a GP on home soil," she said. "There are huge risks with flying after a procedure like bariatric surgery, but some clinics are suggesting you come out, have the surgery and fly home in a couple of days."

Marc Pacifico, president of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS), said: "With any drug or injectable product, it is crucial that the provenance, safety record and ingredients have been checked and regulated.

"The risks of being injected with an unknown product could cause serious medical harm and have short- and long-term consequences. BAAPS would urge anyone considering undergoing injectable treatment to ensure they see a reputable clinician who uses products that are both CE marked, MHRA approved and, if a prescribed medicine, available on the British National Formulary."

Headteacher took her own life after low Ofsted rating, family says

Emine Sinmaz

A headteacher killed herself after she was told her school would be given the lowest possible Ofsted rating, her family has said.

Ruth Perry, who had worked at Caversham primary school in Reading for 13 years, took her own life in January after being told the school was being downgraded from outstanding to inadequate.

Her sister, Julia Waters, said the 53-year-old had described the inspection on 15 and 16 November last year as the worst day of her life. She added that Perry had been "an absolute shadow of her former self" while waiting for the report's publication.

Matt Rodda, the Labour MP for Reading East, said Ofsted must take action after Perry's "devastating" death. "Ofsted must now ask themselves some tough questions about their role and how we prevent further tragedies in the future," he said.

Rodda said he had met the schools minister, Nick Gibb, adding: "I think it's fair to say there are local concerns about the way the inspection was carried out, also about the way the Ofsted framework and other regulations affecting Ofsted effectively work, and the wider pressure on headteachers."

Waters told BBC South that Perry had been informed that the school's rating would be downgraded on the first day of the inspection, which was the first she had faced as headteacher.

She said inspectors reported that a boy doing a flossing dance move, from the video game Fortnite, was evidence of the sexualisation of children at the school. She added that inspectors told staff they had seen child-on-child abuse, which turned out to be a playground fight.

The report, which was published this week, found the school to be good in every category apart from leadership and management, where it was judged to be inadequate, the lowest rating. It meant the entire school dropped to the lowest rating.

Waters said the rating had deeply affected her sister, who had been a pupil at the school. "This one-word judgment is just destroying 32 years of her vocation, 32 years summed up in one word - inadequate," she said. "It just preyed on her mind until she couldn't take it any more."

The report said school leaders did not have the "required knowledge to keep pupils safe from harm".

Matthew Purves, Ofsted's regional director for the south-east, said: "We were deeply saddened by Ruth Perry's tragic death. Our thoughts remain with Mrs Perry's family, friends and everyone in the Caversham primary school community."

Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org

TV review

Even Streep can't save this twisty eco-drama

Extrapolations

Apple TV+ ★★★★★

Lucy Mangan

I'm not too sure where to begin with *Extrapolations*, Apple TV+'s star-studded anthology series about the possible impact of the climate crisis on humanity's future. On the one hand, it is well intentioned and at its best drives home the horror of impending doom through finely constructed tales and brilliant performances. On the other, there is a death-by-walrus that is not played for laughs, Meryl Streep voicing a humpback whale, and an impenetrable heap of chaos in the opening episode.

Let's call it a mixed bag. Creator Scott Z Burns wrote the 2011 Steven Soderbergh hit *Contagion*, which enjoyed a resurgence during the pandemic. In *Extrapolations* there is less to get hold of, even though there is plenty going on. The first, wildly convoluted, episode is set in



2037 during crisis talks about global heating while forest fires, droughts, riots and refugees abound. Its main purpose seems to be to impart the project's heavy sense of its own worthiness and to introduce us to the main characters.

Matthew Rhys plays an amoral profiteer; Rhys's agent I suspect needs a word about reading to the end of a script to discover what's in the main characters.

Kit Harington is the tech billionaire Nick Bilton and Sienna Miller plays pregnant research scientist Rebecca, whose baby will be born with "summer heart", a genetic abnormality caused by pollution. *Extrapolations* is at its best when it finds the sweet

▲ **Tobey Maguire and Eiza González in the convoluted drama Extrapolations. Left, Meryl Streep**
PHOTOGRAPH: ZACH DILGARD/APPLE TV+

spot between lecturing and enlightening, but these moments don't come frequently enough. More often it is stuck at the student debate level of the first episode.

Even at its best, it fails to move in the same way that, say, Russell T Davies's *Years and Years* did as it condensed the existential threat of the climate emergency into its effects on one family over decades. There, the fear was evoked far more effectively than any effort to show the true scale of what faces us, however starry the cast.

Hunt sign-up payments 'will do little to solve crisis in childcare'

Carmen Aguilar García
Jedidajah Otte

Sign-up payments for new childminders will do little to address a crisis in a sector that existing professionals have been leaving in droves, according to experts.

The number of childminders in England is at its lowest level in a decade, with 28,500 registered as of December 2022, according to Ofsted data – the lowest since 2012 and 24% down from at the end of 2019.

Dwindling incomes in a cost of living crisis, rising stress levels and the increasingly complex needs of families are all leading to the exodus, with not enough new childminders joining the workforce to replace the leavers.

The chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, this week announced a £4bn expansion

of government-funded childcare that will provide an extra 30 hours a week in term time for children from the age of nine months to two years, including the piloting of incentive payments of £600 for new childminders, or £1,200 for those who join via an agency.

Neil Leitch, the chief executive of the Early Years Alliance, welcomed government recognition of the decline in childminders, but criticised what he called the “paltry sign-up payments” as “unhelpful”.

Various childminders who contacted the Guardian referred to the prohibitively high cost of setting up a business, suggesting this was putting off potential childminders.

“Rather than putting all their energy into attracting new childminders to the sector, ministers would do well to prioritise retaining the thousands of existing professionals who we know are leaving in their droves,” Leitch said.

Megan Jarvie, the head of Coram Family and Childcare, said it was helpful for Hunt to recognise the need for investment to expand the sector, but his proposals “will not help experienced childminders to stay”.

According to data from the Department for Education, childcare providers have fallen by 15% in three years, with 11,500 fewer registered at the end of 2022. Four in five of these lost providers were childminders.



◀ The rosy pink petals of *Spiranthes hachijoensis*

PHOTOGRAPH: MASAYUKI ISHIBASHI/KOBE UNIVERSITY

Scientists in Japan discover species of pink orchid hidden in plain sight

Damien Gayle

It is extremely rare for a new plant species to be discovered in Japan, a country with a rich history of horticulture. But the rosy pink petals of *Spiranthes hachijoensis* are found in

lawns, parks and gardens and yet, until now, no one knew it existed. That is because it was believed that all the *Spiranthes* on the Japanese mainland were a single species, when there are two.

Spiranthes australis, known to western gardeners as ladies' tresses, is Japan's most familiar orchid. It has

been documented for centuries. It was while studying *Spiranthes australis* during fieldwork that Prof Kenji Suetsugu of Kobe University noticed that some had hairless stems, while most were furrier. He and a team of scientists embarked on a decade-long study, collecting specimens in Japan, Taiwan and Laos.

They discovered the new *hachijoensis* taxon was a cryptic species exhibiting molecular divergence from its similar *australis* cousins, which it often grows alongside.

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◀ An infrared image from Nasa's Spitzer space telescope shows the Helix nebula, a cosmic starlet

PHOTOGRAPHS: NASA; AUBREY GEMIGNANI/NASA

'Best job on Earth'

The starstruck girl who grew up to be Nasa science chief

Linda Geddes

Women should never be afraid to ask questions, says Nicola Fox, Nasa's new science chief, and only the second woman to hold this position in the agency's history. In her view, being curious and having a ton of questions are the hallmarks of a successful scientist - even if asking them can feel intimidating. "Sometimes you feel if you're the only woman in the room that you probably shouldn't speak up, because everybody might think you're stupid. But I've worked really hard on trying to tell people that there are no stupid questions - most of the time if you speak up, at

least 30% of the people in the room will have the same question, and weren't brave enough to ask it."

Growing up in Hitchin, in rural Hertfordshire, Fox was encouraged to think big from a young age. One of her earliest memories is of a family holiday to Spain, aged three, where instead of a bedtime story, her father used a range of objects from their hotel room to illustrate how the solar system worked.

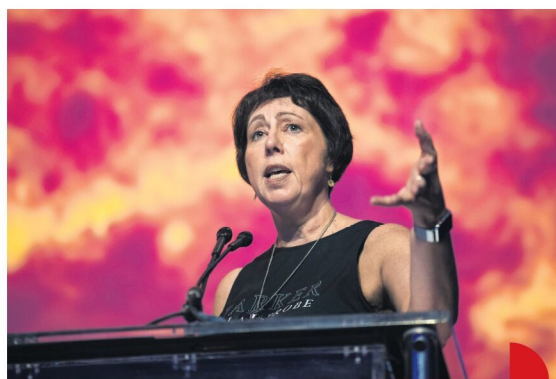
On clear nights, he would look wistfully up at the moon and ask if she could imagine what it must be like to walk up there. "Every time we saw a [space] launch, particularly the shuttle launches, he would make comments like 'there couldn't be any better job in the world than working for Nasa'," Fox says. "I definitely grew up sort of starstruck by space."

But while her father may take the credit for inspiring her, Fox

credits her "quietly determined" mother for pushing her to succeed at school, and beyond. "She may not have dreamt of walking on the moon, but she was damn sure I was going to have every opportunity I needed, if I wanted to," Fox says.

Asked whether she should take up her current position as administrator for the Science Mission Unit - overseeing some of Nasa's best-known programmes, with an annual budget of roughly \$7bn - her mother's response was straightforward and encouraging. "She was like: 'Of course you should, absolutely, go take it.'"

Fox says she always knew she wanted to be a scientist - agreeing with her father that the best thing in the world would be to work for Nasa - although it wasn't until she was a PhD student at Imperial College London that she realised this was a genuine possibility.



'I'm very hopeful that we will find great exoplanets and life-sustainable planets in other stellar systems'

Nicola Fox
Nasa

She was researching solar substorms - brief disturbances in Earth's magnetic field that cause energy to be injected into the upper atmosphere, resulting in a sudden brightening of the northern lights - and had been using data from Nasa spacecraft, when a Nasa scientist asked if she would be interested in applying for a postdoctoral fellowship.

"It was one of those 'all the air

left the room' kind of moments," she says. "I'm sure my knees went wobbly. It was an enormous thing for somebody to ask if I'd consider it, rather than me having to sort of beg for it."

Fox submitted her application, and got through, working her way up to head Nasa's heliophysics division, which studies the sun, its planets and space environment. Its Parker Solar Probe mission, which aims to gather the first-ever samples of a star's atmosphere by flying to within 4m miles of the sun's surface, remains close to her heart: "It is the mission I get most excited by because I was the project scientist for that. Seeing it continuing to do great things - travelling through the sun's corona closer than anything that's ever been before - is something that I have personal pride in."

But there are other close contenders. In her new role, Fox will oversee more than 100 Nasa missions, investigating such questions as how hurricanes form on Earth, how to best support astronauts on the moon, and whether we are alone in the universe, as well as supporting scientists and engineers at all stages of their careers.

"The inspiring thing about Nasa is just the sheer breadth of what we do. We're all excited about putting astronauts on the moon again through the Artemis programme - and sending people to the south pole of the moon. But we have some other amazing launches coming up this year, including Psyche, which is going to a very interesting asteroid orbiting the sun between Mars and Jupiter that contains a lot of heavy metals."

Another theme that excites Fox is the search for life: "I don't mean that in the sci-fi way, but looking for planets in different stellar systems that could sustain life," she says.

"We're working on completely new concepts like the Habitable Worlds Observatory - our next big astrophysics telescope, which will look for the biometric signatures that would tell us if life could be sustained on [other] planets."

This year, the OSIRIS-REx mission is expected to return samples from the near-Earth asteroid Bennu, which could provide new insights into how our solar system formed, and the emergence of water on Earth, while the Europa Clipper and Dragonfly missions, scheduled for 2024 and 2027, will conduct detailed reconnaissance of Jupiter's moon Europa, and Saturn's moon Titan - including whether they have conditions suitable for life.

"I'm very hopeful that we will find great exoplanets and life-sustainable planets in other stellar systems," says Fox.

Finding actual life on such planets may take a little longer though, due to their distance from Earth and the challenges of getting there: "That's for somebody that comes after me, I think," Fox says.

Eyewitnessed

Pictures of the week

► Smoke rises during an eruption from Mount Merapi, Indonesia's most active volcano, which caused more than 350 deaths in 2010

DEVI RAHMAN/
GETTY IMAGES



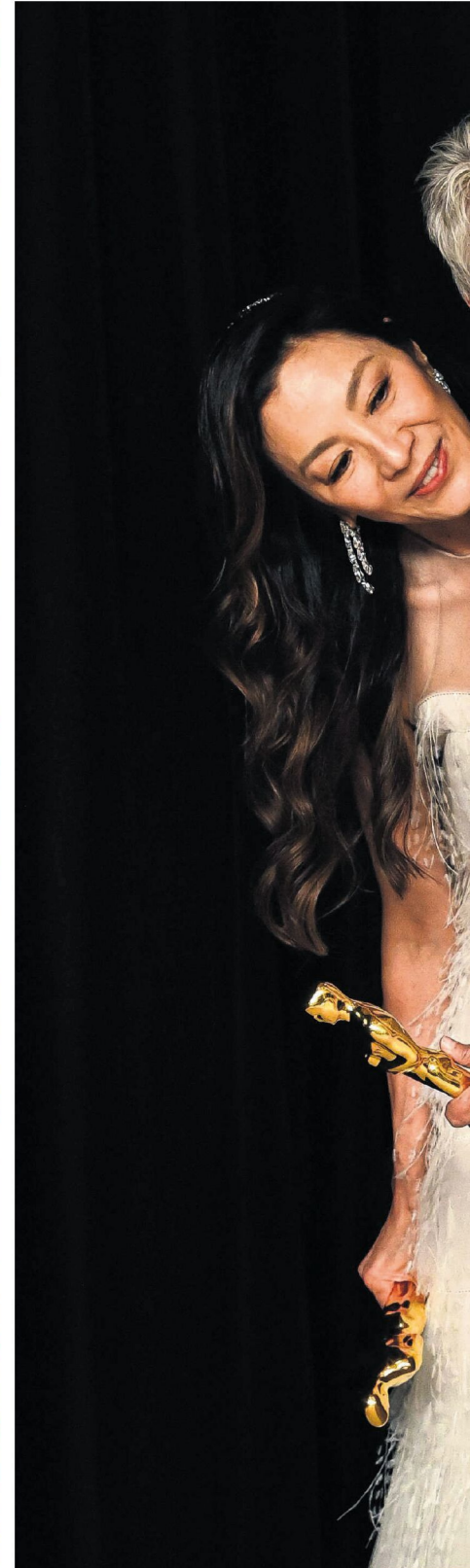
▼ A fight for territory between two male peacocks goes aerial in Tamil Nadu, south India

ETHIRAJAN
SKRINIVASAN/
MEDIADUM



► Dancers in the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq mark the anniversary of the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein

SAFIN HAMED/
GETTY IMAGES



▲ Michelle Yeoh, left, and Jamie Lee Curtis after receiving Oscars at the 95th Academy Awards in Los Angeles
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID FISHER/KEF/SHUTTERSTOCK



► Horses on the opening day of the Cheltenham festival take the water jump during the Handicap Chase
MICHAEL STEELE/GETTY IMAGES



▲ A woman returns to a village near Izium, eastern Kharkiv, which was liberated from the Russians in September
MUHAMMED ENES YILDIRIM/GETTY



◀ The aurora borealis lights up the night sky above Snæfellsnes in western Iceland
BEN BUSH/BAV MEDIA



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Emma Brockes
New York diary



The question for the US was: is Hugh Grant Rude or Just British?

Monday

With US banks teetering on the edge, 10,000 jobs cut at Facebook and the global economy fighting another doom spiral, we turn our attention, naturally, to comments made by Hugh Grant on the red carpet at the Oscars.

Sunday's ceremony, which was watched by more people than last year but still fewer than can fit into a mid-size Scandinavian country, delivered a solid piece of pre-show drama when the 62-year-old British actor ran into Ashley Graham, the model-turned-TV-host, who invited him to share his joy at being there.

I have always had a soft spot for Grant, who specialises in the kind of hang-dog contrition commonly seen in children appealing for clemency before you know what they've done.

In his latest public appearance, Grant was on chillier form, as he sought to communicate to viewers, via a series of abrupt answers, his disdain for red carpet interviews in general and Ashley Graham in particular. The question for the American press on Monday morning, as articulated by the Washington Post, was: Is Hugh Grant Rude or Just British?

I think we can say with some confidence that Grant's I-don't-understand-the-question deadpan and drive-by reference to Thackeray's most famous work was a case of laughing at Graham, not with her. (Graham,

leaning gamely into the headwind, ploughed on.) Of course he was being a prat, and of course these events are appalling, and of course the red carpet interviews are stupid. But what might Grant have liked to be asked about? His thoughts on Ukraine, perhaps; or his sense of where the banking crisis may lead? Oh, look; now I'm being a prat, too.

Most sensible people, I suspect, would agree that if you are inclined to play the game to the extent of showing up at an event to present an award, you have to dig deep and be gracious throughout.

Graham, meanwhile, staying as ruthlessly on brand as her interviewee, later told TMZ that, as her mother always taught her, you gotta get out there and "kill them with kindness", and - naturally - she had "had so much fun".

Tuesday

More adventures in showbiz via the reliably excellent Dawn French, whose live show, Dawn French Is a Huge Twat, has been causing headaches for the advertising watchdog after an ad featuring that title appeared in the Sunday Times and - checks notes - two people complained.

Job done from the point of view of French's publicists, but it leads one to consider other titles that do more heavy lifting than the product itself.

Sean Penn, with his 2018 novel Bob Honey Who Just Do Stuff, is a strong performer in this area, as is Russell Brand's My Boooky Wook - though, unlike French, neither has the advantage of being funny.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies was a smart solicitation for eyeballs. So was Another Bullshit Night in Suck City by Nick Flynn. It's hard to credit it, now, but The Vagina Monologues by V, formerly Eve Ensler, was every bit as arresting as the Dawn French title when it opened in 1996. Ultimately nothing will beat the original name of TVGoHome's satirical fly-on-wall documentary about Nathan Barley, which those too young to remember can look up, or work out for themselves since it's the final, unpublishable word on the vagina/twat synonyms continuum.

Oh, the whole of humanity is here. It's Vanity Fair

PHOTOGRAPH BY: FRANK AUGSTEIN; CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



Alison Hammond replaces Matt Lucas as Bake Off host

Jamie Grierson

Alison Hammond has confirmed she will be the new co-host of The Great British Bake Off.

The presenter of This Morning will join forces with the comedian Noel Fielding in the next series of the Channel 4 baking show.

Hammond is replacing Matt Lucas, who revealed in December he was stepping down from his joint-presenter role as he could no longer commit to the programme's schedule alongside his other projects.

Yesterday, Hammond posted a video on Instagram of a cake designed in the shape of the Bake Off tent, which features models of her, Fielding and the judges Paul Hollywood and Prue Leith. In a voiceover, the presenter says: "This is breaking news: Alison Hammond is joining the team of The Great British Bake Off."

As animated microphones appear on the screen, Hammond asks her figurine if she has any comment, to which she replies: "Do you know what? I'm absolutely thrilled. I'm going to be meeting the bakers very soon. I'm joining The Great British Bake Off. I'm so very excited."

Alongside the post, she wrote: "It's official! It's happening. The Great British Bake Off! Let's have it - the cake, that is. So excited."

Hollywood welcomed her to the show, posting on his Instagram: "Looking forward to seeing you in the tent - you're going to love it."

The show's official Twitter account also confirmed the news, saying it was "delighted" to announce she would be joining the team.

Hammond will be the first person of colour to be a host or judge on the show since it began in 2010.

Before joining This Morning, she competed in the third series of Big Brother and has since gone on to appear in several reality shows including I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!, Celebrity Coach Trip and Strictly Come Dancing.

More recently, she appeared alongside the actor Richard E Grant

I don't care who she is: no kit, no participation



Wednesday

The clocks went forward in New York this week, briefly narrowing the time difference with GMT to four hours and bringing on what might be called micro-jetlag (no one in my house can get up).

So pity the high school students of some schools in Indonesia who, after the Indonesian authorities launched a pilot scheme to start school in East Nusa Tenggara province at 5.30am, are being forced to get up at 4am before plunging out into the dark. According to the governor, this is designed to strengthen children's discipline, at the cost of ruining the lives of the rest of the family.

I long for an experiment in the other direction, in which school starts at 10am and we actually manage for a single, miraculous day to arrive on time.

Thursday

Do you carry a water bottle to work? Do you send your kid with one to school? The obsession with hydration is decades deep, but still too shallow to reach back to my school days.

I sometimes freak my children out by telling them that entire days would go by when I didn't drink water and no one thought anything of it.

As it turns out, what an Australian psychologist has termed "emotional support water bottles" might not represent the straightforward advance in human wellness we assume. Dr Keong Yap of Australian Catholic University

made his comments about bottles-as-security-blankets to the New York Post in response to a recent US study that found reusable water bottles can contain 40,000 times more germs than the average toilet seat.

More-germs-than-the-toilet is a hardy PR formulation, and it should be noted that the study was funded by a water filter company.

Still, I'm looking at the giant bottle on my desk and suppressing a mild urge to heave. Apparently, you are supposed to wash these things every day? With hot, soapy water? And not just run them briskly under the cold tap now and then?

Friday

One of my favourite types of TV clip, after people falling over or news hosts mispronouncing "Jeremy Hunt", is a good find on Antiques Roadshow.

This week the BBC show was at Belmont House in Faversham, Kent, where a guest stepped forward to present a painting - a beautiful, abstract in grey-greens - that had been in his family for a long time. He suspected it might be by a famous artist.

Whereupon Rupert Mass, the expert on hand, informed him it was by David Hockney and worth in the region of £20,000-£30,000.

Suppressing large emotions, the man said mildly: "Thank you for that information. Thank you very much." A moment of exemplary Britishness that quite made up for Hugh Grant.



▲ Alison Hammond, who presents This Morning, said she was thrilled to be joining the Bake Off team

to host the 2023 Baftas. Hammond also appeared on an episode of The Great Celebrity Bake Off, in which she momentarily became confused about the whereabouts of her oven door.

After Bake Off moved from the BBC to Channel 4 in 2017, Fielding and Sandi Toksvig took over from Sue Perkins and Mel Giedroyc as presenters. Toksvig announced her departure from the show in 2020 and was replaced by Lucas, who co-hosted the past three series.

Hammond's appointment was met with enthusiasm from industry colleagues, with the actor Joel Dommett commenting "such great news" and the presenter Claudia Winkleman writing "brilliant" in the comments on her Instagram post.

Lorraine Kelly tweeted: "Big congrats to the force of nature that is our @AlisonHammond - she will be fabulous on Bake Off."

Environment



Reservoir of pain Plan to divert Welsh water to London reopens old wounds

Sandra Laville

On a February night 60 years ago three young men battled through blizzard conditions to plant a bomb at a construction site in a lonely Welsh valley. Their target was a massive dam, being built by an English privatised water company in order to supply water to Liverpool.

The people in the small Snowdonia village of Capel Celyn were to be evicted, in order to “drown” their homes, farms, post office, school, chapel and cemetery to create a reservoir to provide million of gallons a day for the English city.

The bomb, which was planted on 9 February 1963 by the Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (Movement for the Defence of Wales) at the electricity transformer powering the development, was an act born of intense opposition to the village drowning, which prompted local people to board buses to Liverpool and march through the streets.

But despite the protests, in October 1965 Frank Gain, an alderman for the Corporation of Liverpool, pulled a lever to sink the village of Capel Celyn under tens of millions of litres of water to create the Llyn Celyn reservoir.

Today, as climate breakdown pushes more regions into drought conditions, water companies are again turning to Wales for water – this time for the south-east of England, including London.

Thames Water wants to take up to 155m litres of water a day from Wales to boost supplies for the most populous part of England in the coming years.

Thames Water is working with United Utilities, which has a licence to abstract water from Lake Vyrnwy reservoir in Powys, and with Severn Trent water. But as the graffiti across north Wales in memory of Capel Celyn show, water continues to be an emotive subject in Wales.

Politicians in Powys are arming themselves for tough negotiations on access to water in the years ahead. Powys county council wants the British and Welsh governments to set up the necessary legislative frameworks to enable its communities to get a financial benefit from the use of its water. The council wants a



▲ Capel Celyn before its ‘drowning’ in 1965. Its residents protested in Liverpool, below, which was to get water from the new reservoir



levy raised on water supplies that are not for the direct benefit of the people of Powys.

Elwyn Vaughan, a Plaid Cymru councillor, said Thames Water officials had been in the Lake Vyrnwy area over the past 12 months. “The drought last year seems to have really focused minds,” said Vaughan. “But before Thames Water look to our water here, my argument is that they should plug their own leaks first – 600m litres a day – rather than putting all this effort into taking water from here.”

He added: “Water is a very sensitive subject. It is a fallacy to assume that plentiful supplies will be here for ever.”

The proposal by water companies is for water from Lake Vyrnwy, currently used by United Utilities to supply Liverpool and north-west England, to be redeployed to supply London and the south-east. Water from the reservoir would be released into the River Vyrnwy and on into the River Severn, where it would be abstracted near Gloucester before being taken to the south-east of England via a new pipeline

Fox news

Five-year hunt for Rambo ends

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◀ Lake Vyrnwy currently supplies Liverpool and England's north-west, but this water would be redeployed

PHOTOGRAPH: JASON HORNBLow/ALAMY

or restored Cotswold canals. Environmental concerns focus on the release of huge volumes of more water into the Vyrnwy and the Severn and the impact on other Welsh rivers.

Ceri Davies, of Natural Resources Wales, said: "This release to the Vyrnwy would need to be carefully controlled to balance other vital requirements such as managing flood risk and ecological impact. We will need to be satisfied that the proposals would not have a detrimental impact on communities and wildlife in Wales."

Gail Davies-Walsh, the chief executive of Afonnydd Cymru (Welsh Rivers Trust), echoed the concerns, saying the Severn was a special area of conservation so it was important that extra flow into it did not have negative impacts.

There are also fears that the knock-on effect of diverting water from Wales to the south-east of England will damage other Welsh rivers. Peter Powell, the chief executive of the Welsh Dee Trust, said: "If they are going to start using Lake Vyrnwy to provide water for England they will have to take more water from the River Dee for Liverpool and the north-west. The Dee is already struggling from overabstraction and this will put huge additional pressure on it."

Capel Celyn evokes intense memories in Wales, rarely more so than last summer when the whole country was plunged into drought and water levels in Llyn Celyn were so low the ghostly remains of the village chapel could be seen emerging from the reservoir floor.

Jane Dodds, the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, said there was a long history in Wales of its raw resources being taken for use in England while local people experienced no benefit, with the drowning of Capel Celyn being one of the most notable examples. She added: "These latest plans by United Utilities, Severn Trent Water and Thames Water risk repeating the same mistakes of the past."

Thames Water said: "The past summer, with extreme heat and lack of water, is a clear indication of climate emergency first-hand. There are no simple solutions and we need to plan ahead to manage a growing population, a changing climate and an increasing drought risk, as well as making sure we can protect our environment."

"The redeployment of water, currently used by United Utilities from Lake Vyrnwy in Wales, is one of a number of ... options being considered. There are no plans to take any additional water from Lake Vyrnwy beyond what is currently permitted to be abstracted by United Utilities under their existing abstraction licence."

Into the wild

Iron-age pigs join bison in Kent wood

Damian Carrington
Environment editor

The UK's first wild bison in millennia have been joined by iron-age pigs, Exmoor ponies and longhorn cattle as the rewilding project moves forward in creating a rich and natural new habitat.

The Wilder Blean project in Kent is deploying the animals to replicate the roles played by mega-herbivores when bison, aurochs - the ancestor of modern cattle - and wild horses roamed prehistoric England. The animals will be closely monitored as they transform a former commercial pine plantation into a wild wood.

The ancient breeds act as ecosystem engineers, with the bison stripping bark from trees and creating the deadwood needed by insects, as well as trampling down corridors of light to spur new plant growth. The ponies complement this by clearing soft vegetation, while the pigs dig around looking for roots and bulbs, spurring seeds to germinate. The longhorn cattle open up the tree canopy and their



actions will be compared with those of the bison. All the changes will encourage bats, birds and other creatures to thrive.

"This is where the project really starts to come to fruition," said Paul Hadaway of the Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), which runs the project along with the Wildwood Trust. "We've had the bison now for eight months, settling into this site and doing some amazing stuff. But the intention was always to have as close to a natural grazing assemblage as we could recreate.

"If you go back to when these English woodlands first evolved, they would have had mega-herbivores," he said. "So this is about returning back to that kind of natural management, to create a much more climate-resilient, adaptable landscape. The pigs are each capable of ploughing about four acres of land a year."

Alison Ruyter of the KWT said: "Wilder grazing is about using native wild breeds of livestock to mimic the things that mega-

▲ The first wild bison calf to be born on the Wilder Blean site and, above right, an iron-age pig

PHOTOGRAPH: DONOVAN WRIGHT/PA

▼ Longhorn cattle will graze the land and help to transform the former commercial pine plantation into a wild wood



herbivores would have done in the past when wild horses, aurochs and bison roamed around the country."

The five-strong bison herd was completed in December, with the arrival of the bull. The surprise birth of a calf was revealed in October. One of the females was already pregnant on arrival in Kent, but bison disguise their pregnancies in order to avoid being targeted by predators.

The bison and cattle herds will be accompanied by ponies, with the pigs moving between the two groups. The rewilding success of each group will be compared with an area with no large herbivores and managed by humans.

All 9,000 bison living in Europe today are descended from just 12 zoo animals, which rescued the species from extinction in the early 20th century. The Kent bison are currently in a 50-hectare (123-acre) area. But this should expand to 200 hectares in the summer once large tunnels are built to enable the gentle giants to cross public footpaths without encountering people.

Rewilding is of increasing interest to conservationists in the UK, which, thanks to intensive farming, is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

'Alarming'

7% of world's mountain forest lost since 2001

Phoebe Weston

An area of mountain forest larger than the state of Texas has been lost since 2001, with the yearly disappearance accelerating at an "alarming" rate, a study warns.

Scientists found that 78m hectares (193m acres) of mountain forest have been lost globally in their past two decades - more than 7% of all that exists. The main drivers were logging, the expansion of agriculture and wildfires.

Mountains are home to more than 85% of the world's birds, mammals and amphibians. These habitats were once more protected than their lowland equivalents as their rugged terrain made them less

accessible, the paper notes. Today, they are increasingly threatened as humans exploit harder-to-reach areas of the planet, and lowland forests are given greater protection.

"Our global analysis of mountain forest loss identifies an alarming acceleration over the past two decades," the researchers, led by scientists from the University of Leeds and the Southern University of Science and Technology in China, wrote in the journal *One Earth*. They found that logging was responsible for 42% of mountain forest loss, wildfires 29%, slash-and-burn cultivation 15%, and semi-permanent or permanent agriculture 10%.

The researchers documented changes in tree cover between 2001 and 2018, working out possible impacts on biodiversity. They found that Asia, South America, Africa, Europe and Australia were all badly affected. Much of the loss in northern Asia was due to wildfires, especially in large parts of Russia. Droughts and bushfires led to big losses in Australia.

The rate of loss rose sharply after 2010, increasing by 50% in 2010-2018 compared with 2001-

2009. Expansion of agriculture and logging in the highland areas of south-east Asia was found to be a key driver. During the period of study, more than half of global forest loss happened in Asia.

The climate crisis is putting pressure on specialist - and often sensitive - mountain wildlife, as warmer temperatures force species to move to higher ground. At some point, they are likely to run out of suitable habitats, a process known as the "escalator to extinction".

Previous studies have shown that alpine plants are not keeping up with climate breakdown, with invasive species colonising the tops of mountains faster. Botanists in the Scottish Highlands also found



▲ Researchers said logging was the cause of 42% of mountain forest loss

that Britain's rarest mountain plants were retreating higher.

More than 40% of the total loss was in tropical mountain forests - considered biodiversity hotspots - putting pressure on threatened species. Zhenzhong Zeng, from Southern University, one of the paper's authors, said: "What needs attention is that mountain forest loss has encroached on areas of known high conservation value to terrestrial biodiversity, especially in the tropics. Various types of agriculture expansion and forestry activities are key drivers there."

The paper found that creating protected areas within biodiversity hotspots lowered the rate of loss. "Increasing the area of protection in mountains should be central to preserving montane forests and biodiversity in the future," it said.

Dr Marco Mina at the Institute for Alpine Environment, in Italy, who was not involved in the study, said: "The use of large-scale data such as remote-sensing satellite products are a great tool to monitor forest change in almost real time. But we should be cautious about drawing global conclusions based solely on remote-sensing products."

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Decades of turmoil
How the war in Iraq
changed the west
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Varadkar in DC
'Ill-judged' Clinton
affair joke falls flat
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World



◀ Police officers in Lyon stand by as fireworks are set off during a protest against a rise in the pension age

PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVIER CHASSIGNOLE/AFP/GETTY

French protests grow after Macron raises pension age

Angelique Chrisafis
Paris

Refinery strikes escalated in France yesterday as the interior minister spoke of protesters wreaking havoc across the country and some MPs called for police protection amid growing anger at the government pushing through a rise in the pension

age without a parliamentary vote. More than 300 people were arrested across France overnight on Thursday during spontaneous protests against Emmanuel Macron's decision to bypass parliament and force through his unpopular pensions changes, including raising the eligible age from 62 to 64.

Macron instructed the prime minister, Elisabeth Borne, to invoke

article 49.3 of the constitution, which allows the government to adopt a bill without a parliamentary vote, because he said there was too much economic risk to the country if MPs voted against the bill.

As opposition politicians accused the government of a brutal and undemocratic approach, demonstrators gathered in cities such as Paris and Rennes and smaller towns

such as Laval and Évreux. About 200 protesters briefly blocked traffic on the Paris ring road early on yesterday morning. In Bordeaux, dozens of protesters stood on the tracks at the main train station.

Strikers voted to halt production at one of the country's largest refineries by Monday at the latest, a representative of the CGT union said. Workers had already been on a rolling strike at the northern site TotalEnergies de Normandie, and halting production would escalate the industrial action and spark fears of fuel shortages. Strikers continued to deliver less fuel than normal from several other sites.

A bin collectors' strike in Paris continued as more than 10,000 tonnes of waste piled up in streets across half of the city. A further day of

coordinated strike action by transport workers and teachers will take place on Thursday. Some teachers' unions have suggested supervisors should also strike early next week when high school students begin their baccalaureate exams.

The interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, warned against what he called the chaos of random, spontaneous street demonstrations. "The opposition is legitimate, the protests are legitimate, but wreaking havoc is not," Darmanin told RTL radio. He complained of "very difficult demonstrations" and denounced the fact that effigies of Macron, Borne and other ministers were burned at a protest in Dijon. He said public buildings had been targeted.

Protesters started fires on side streets on Thursday night in Paris and caused damage to shop fronts after police used teargas and water cannon to clear hundreds of people who had gathered in the historic Place de la Concorde. By 11.30pm, 217 people had been arrested on suspicion of seeking to cause damage, Paris police said.

The head of Macron's centrist Renaissance party in parliament, Aurore Berge, wrote to Darmanin asking him to ensure the protection of MPs who feared violence against them. She said she would not accept MPs living in "fear of reprisals". The interior minister replied to say police would be vigilant against any violence directed towards lawmakers.

Macron's plan to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 was passed by the surprise, last-minute use of a special constitutional power after two months of coordinated nationwide strikes and some of the biggest protests in decades. The government took the decision after it feared it could not secure a majority of MPs to vote in favour.

Unions immediately called for another day of mass strikes and protests for next Thursday, calling the government's move "a complete denial of democracy".

What next? President can't rely on the right for support

Angelique Chrisafis

When furious protesters in Dijon set fire to a stuffed dummy of Emmanuel Macron, and thousands of people spontaneously took to the streets in cities such as Paris, Rennes and Marseille this week to demonstrate

against the government raising the pension age without a vote in parliament, the French interior minister said the chaos had "brought back bad memories".

Indeed, four years after the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) anti-government movement saw people in small towns and the countryside rise up, Macron was once again accused by many working-class voters of disdain for the mood on the street. Politicians from his party were yet again asking for

police protection for fear of violent reprisals against them.

The French president chose on Thursday to use controversial executive powers contained in article 49.3 of the French constitution in order to bypass parliament and push through his unpopular plan to raise the pension age from 62 to 64 without a vote.

He argued there was no choice, saying that losing a vote would have spooked the markets and damaged the economy.

France's 65-year-old constitution concentrates power in the hands of the president at the expense of MPs, allowing him to override a divided parliament in certain circumstances. But the unpopular move could define Macron's

domestic programme and his remaining four years in office.

The former banker who once promised to reconcile the French people with their increasingly distrusted political class was accused by critics of worsening the disillusionment with politics, and



▲ Rubbish collectors in Paris went on strike over the pension age changes

potentially giving the far right a future election boost.

The question is what happens next. The government may survive the vote of no confidence, which it faces on Monday. It will be difficult for opposition parties to get the absolute majority required without the right's Les Républicains, whose leadership currently refuses to support it. But analysts say there are no certainties.

Macron has been severely undermined in the national assembly since his centrist grouping failed to win an absolute majority in parliamentary elections last June. The pensions row showed how the right cannot be depended upon to help the president get legislation through.

President Xi to visit Moscow for first time since Ukraine invasion

Isobel Koshiw Kyiv
Amy Hawkins
Agencies

China's president is to visit Russia next week in an apparent show of support for Vladimir Putin, the Chinese foreign ministry said. The Kremlin also announced the visit, scheduled from Monday to Wednesday, saying it would take place "at the invitation of Vladimir Putin".

The news came before the international criminal court in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Putin and his children's rights commissioner, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, for the "unlawful deportation" of Ukrainian children.

The Kremlin said Xi Jinping and Putin would be discussing issues of further development of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction between Russia and China, as well as exchanging views "in the context of deepening

Russian-Chinese cooperation in the international arena". The two leaders will also sign "important" bilateral documents.

The visit will be Xi's first foreign trip since he secured a third term as China's president at the annual parliamentary session on 10 March. It will also be the first time Xi has visited Putin, the man he has previously described as his "best friend", since Russia invaded Ukraine last year.

Meanwhile, Slovakia has become the second Nato member to announce that it will donate MiG-29 warplanes to Ukraine following Poland's decision on Thursday. Slovakia's prime minister, Eduard Heger, said yesterday that his government was "on the right side of history" as he announced that it would hand over its fleet of 13 Soviet-era MiGs.

Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, said four of its own aircraft would arrive in Ukraine in the coming days, but did not state how many it would send in total. It remains to be seen



▲ Ukrainian Oleksandr Nikiforov receives first aid after being injured by shelling near Kostiantynivka

PHOTOGRAPH: EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

how much the jets will help Ukraine blunt Russia's assaults and break its defensive lines in the counteroffensive expected this spring.

The planes that Slovakia and Poland are providing are 30-year-old MiGs, rather than the modern fighter jets - Typhoons and F-16s - that Ukraine has campaigned for.

Western countries have been reluctant to give Ukraine this kind

of equipment, which can reach inside Russia, saying it would take years to train pilots and set up supply chains for maintaining the jets. But the UK has offered to provide air cover for any eastern European allies willing to send jets to Ukraine.

Since January, Ukraine has been asking its allies for modern fighters to beat back Russian forces from their defensive positions on the frontlines and to aid air defence efforts around energy infrastructure.

Ukraine argues that it has proved its capabilities with the equipment provided so far.

Nato expansion Turkey lifts Finland veto

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, finally lifted his veto on Finland's application to join Nato, a move that strengthens the west's ability to withstand any future Russian threat across the Baltic Sea but leaves Sweden's bid for membership unresolved.

Erdoğan, after a highly choreographed meeting with the Finnish president, Sauli Niinistö, in Ankara, said yesterday he would recommend to the Turkish parliament that it vote to back Finland's application to join, becoming the 31st member of the alliance.

Erdoğan has been demanding Finland and Sweden do more to clamp down on Kurdish activists, but his objections about Sweden's behaviour are more deep-seated.

The decision complicates Nato defence planning, but the complexity depends on how long Turkey keeps Sweden in the waiting room. Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato secretary general, said he could not consider the circumstances in which it would not come to Sweden's defence if it were attacked by Russia.

Patrick Wintour

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◀ *Malnourished: a Yanomami toddler in Santo Antônio hospital in Boa Vista, Brazil*

PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL DANTAS/AFR/GETTY

'Utterly criminal' The Indigenous lives blighted by the rush for Amazon gold

Tom Phillips
Boa Vista

The severely malnourished baby Yanomami girl is about eight months old but weighs just 2.75kg (6 lbs) - less than half the average for her age. A catheter runs into her tiny right foot, delivering a blood transfusion doctors hope will save her life.

"This is a really difficult moment for us," says Francinete Rodrigues, the director of the Santo Antônio children's hospital in Boa Vista, an institution on the frontline of an Indigenous health catastrophe that Brazil's president calls an attempted genocide.

The Amazon hospital is no stranger to crisis. For almost a decade it has been dealing with the fallout from the humanitarian collapse in neighbouring Venezuela, with thousands of migrants and refugees flocking here in search of treatment unavailable in their crumbling homeland.

More recently, a second calamity has hit the hospital's casualty department, with a growing number of seriously ill Yanomami children being admitted because of the dire conditions in the Indigenous territory where they live, which is the size of Portugal.

Forty-seven Indigenous children died at Santo Antônio last year, most before their first birthday. In 2021, there were 56 deaths. In 2020, 31. Activists say a total of at

least 570 Yanomami children have died preventable deaths since 2018 thanks to a toxic cocktail of government neglect, local corruption and an onslaught from illegal mining gangs.

"When Indigenous children are brought to the hospital it's nearly always for more than one reason: malnutrition, dehydration, pneumonia, malaria - and sometimes they come with two, three or four of these ailments," Rodrigues said during a tour of the hospital's wing for Indigenous patients, where families lie in hammocks designed to make the rainforest-dwellers feel at home.

On the day the Guardian visited, 56 Yanomami children were receiving treatment, two in intensive care. Two days earlier a seven-month-old Yanomami baby had died of pneumonia in that unit. Doctors hoped the skeletal girl being given a blood transfusion would avoid the same fate.

The crisis - which President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared a public health emergency in January - is the third major tragedy to strike the Yanomami in the past 50 years.

Large numbers of outsiders first began invading their mountainous domain in the early 1970s after the military dictatorship bulldozed a road through it, bringing destruction and epidemics that wiped out entire villages.

In the 1980s, as the price of gold soared, tens of thousands of miners - known by the Yanomami as *uriti wapo pē* ("earth eaters") - came to wreak further havoc.

'More than a humanitarian tragedy - what I saw was a genocide'

President Luiz Inácio
Lula da Silva

"These fierce men appeared in the forest suddenly ... frenetically searching for an evil thing that we had never heard about and whose name they repeated unceasingly: gold," the shaman and activist Davi Kopenawa wrote in his autobiography, *The Falling Sky*. Fiona Watson, a Survival

International activist who has worked with the Yanomami for more than 30 years, said violence and disease killed an estimated 20% of them between 1987 and 1993. A global outcry forced government action. Tens of thousands of miners were evicted and the protected Yanomami territory was created in 1992.

"We never thought that what happened in the 80s would repeat itself. We thought that we were free," said Dário Kopenawa, the vice-president of the Yanomami association Hutukara and Davi Kopenawa's son. "But we weren't."

Since 2016, rising prices for gold and cassiterite, a tin ore, have provoked another deadly invasion. The influx of illegal

miners accelerated after the far-right president Jair Bolsonaro took power in 2019 and torpedoed the Indigenous and environmental agencies preventing such criminals from running wild.

Experts say the presence of more than 20,000 miners aggravated a longstanding health crisis in the far-flung enclave, where Yanomami hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists have lived for thousands of years.

Heavily armed miners commandeered dirt runways used by health teams and frightened off the few medical professionals caring for Yanomami health. They also scared off game and poisoned fish with mercury, and caused an explosion of malaria, with devastating consequences. A local corruption racket compounded the problem by depriving thousands of Yanomami children of essential medicines such as the anti-worm treatment albendazole.

"[Bolsonaro] has blood on his hands," Watson said of the ex-president's failure to act.

"To get to the extent where Yanomami children are dying from starvation in one of the most biodiverse ... rainforests anywhere - where under normal circumstances they can live completely self-sufficiently and live really well - is horrendous and utterly criminal."

Alisson Marugal, a federal prosecutor helping investigate the causes and culprits behind the alleged genocide, recalled witnessing "awful scenes of almost war-like destruction" while visiting Yanomami villages overrun by illegal miners in 2021 and 2022. Last April, Marugal's team publicly denounced the "humanitarian tragedy" playing out.

The situation changed after Lula's inauguration on 1 January. The new president flew to Boa Vista to denounce a tragedy foretold. "More than a humanitarian crisis, what I saw ... was a genocide," Lula said before ordering a major crackdown to expel the miners.

Givanildo dos Santos Lima, a field operations chief responsible for the environment agency's Yanomami operation, vowed to stay "for as long as it takes" but warned that fighting such audacious and well-funded criminal groups was dangerous and would take at least a year.

"It's a kamikaze situation. You're not just dealing with ordinary environmental criminals. These are people who are ready to do anything in the name of really big profits," Lima said, adding that the full scale of the environmental devastation remained unclear.

Watson suspects the human impact is similarly uncertain: "We don't know the worst of it. There will be areas nobody is getting to."

As troops battled to reclaim Yanomami lands, and health teams worked to save Yanomami lives, the emaciated baby girl fought to stay alive. A week after the Guardian's visit she remained in hospital, struggling to gain weight. "[Bolsonaro] turned his back and he left the Yanomami to die," Dário Kopenawa said. "He allowed the rivers and animals to die [and] he allowed the children to die."



▲ A Yanomami mother with her child in Santo Antônio hospital, where the Indigenous wards are equipped with hammocks for convalescence



How the war in Iraq changed the course of history in the Middle East

Martin Chulov
Baghdad

In Baghdad's heart of power, Iraq's prime minister arrives at work each day in a building once used by Tariq Aziz, Saddam Hussein's close adviser and foreign minister. The ruins of a Saddam-era defence building still teeter next door, 20 years after an American bomb crashed through its roof to herald the start of the war.

Not far away the green dome of the Republican palace, built by King Faisal and then used by Hussein, covers a still-standing totem of Iraq's history.

All around the Emerald City, the political heart of the Iraqi capital, scattered remnants of the past remain – the Ba'ath party headquarters that was a politburo under Saddam and was transformed into the court that

condemned him; the decaying grandeur of Agatha Christie's house on the west bank of the Tigris; the grave of Gertrude Bell, the British archaeologist and Arabist, on the other side of the dying river.

On the road to Baghdad's airport lies a more recent tribute to the Iranian overlord Qassem Suleimani and his accomplice, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis – a memorial with the remains of the vehicle the pair were travelling in when, in January 2020, a US device killed them.

Other monuments to Iraq's grand history stood for millennia but barely survived the biggest shock its people had to face: the war that began 20 years ago this week.

The invasion, launched in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, set in motion a catastrophic civil war, sending millions into exile, and forcing a violent tussle for power and influence that has viscerally changed the region. Its legacies include the emboldening

of Iran, the marauders of Islamic State who shredded borders and killed and displaced millions, and the disintegration of Syria.

It wasn't always that way. As a young US marine sergeant dispatched to Kuwait for the invasion, Ken Griffin had wanted, he said, to make a positive difference. "When we began our march to Baghdad I was 100% certain we were there for the right reasons. When you're a young marine it's unfathomable that the government would lie to you. Or

send you to war when it didn't have to. When you're in that situation and find yourself in battle you aren't hindered by the little things – like 'should we be here?' or 'is that just?' – you know in all your heart that it's the right thing to do.

"When you see columns of Iraqi soldiers gladly surrendering in exchange for food and shelter, it reinforces that belief. When men, women and children are smiling and waving at your column, you know all you need to know. Later, when Iraqis attack you under the cover of darkness you don't think it might be the same people who were smiling and waving ... The fact they could be the same people – that's a cynical realisation you won't be ready for until years later."

The greeting for American forces as liberators, then the fighting against them as occupiers, became a reality for troops who had helped topple Saddam and stayed behind, ostensibly to help rebuild the

country. By late 2003 George W. Bush's belief that Iraq could be transformed into a democracy at the heart of the Middle East was looking ill conceived. Within three years it had become a bloody delusion that had killed several thousand US troops and more than 100,000 Iraqis, and spiralled the country into an abyss. Attempts to promote the rule of law and state foundations barely took root, nor did efforts to break patronage systems that siphoned tens of billions from state coffers into the pockets of the powerful and the networks they used to entrench themselves.

Iraq's politicians, many of whom were members of exiled groups supported by Iran, were not always committed to nation building nor to Washington's project to turn the mess of Iraq into something that could pass as a dignified exit.

US support for a little-known MP named Nouri al-Maliki to become prime minister in 2006 was an important period in post-Saddam Iraq. But the decision to support him for a second time, four years later, when a rival had secured more election votes, was a defining point in the country's history.

Simon Collis, the former British ambassador to Baghdad and Damascus, said: "Maliki was like the sorcerer's apprentice. He had wanted to whip up a small storm

'We were attacked by people who might have been smiling and waving before'

Ken Griffin
US marine sergeant

► A statue of Saddam Hussein is pulled down in Baghdad in 2003

PHOTOGRAPH: TRINITY MIKKOK/ALAMY



◄ Families leave Basra across one of the town's bridges guarded by British soldiers in March 2003, 10 days after the invasion began

PHOTOGRAPH: IAN CHUNG/THE GUARDIAN



◄ Suspected foreign insurgents are led to a helicopter for questioning in November 2005 in north-west Iraq

PHOTOGRAPH: SEAN SMITH/THE GUARDIAN

that would drive Shia voters to support him as the strongman who alone could deal with a threat that he had created. By the time I arrived in Baghdad, in mid-2012, Maliki's people were dismantling the Sahwa, the moderate local security forces that [the US general] Petraeus had established in [Sunni] Anbar and elsewhere as a bulwark against al-Qaida in Iraq.

"Six months later Mosul fell to Isis forces as three divisions of the Iraqi army broke and ran. Isis took territory village by village by presenting themselves as the only group who could protect the population from Maliki's forces ... as the central government in Baghdad under Maliki's leadership could not exert control."

The Isis years were among the darkest in the modern history of the Middle East. Spawned in part from the disaffected Sunnis of Iraq, amplified by the release of Islamist prisoners in Syria to contaminate a civilian uprising, the terror group was able to lay claim to restoring lost dignities and providing for people when a government would not. Through 2014-15 it seized a vast swathe of land, shredding the international border, establishing a so-called caliphate across Iraq and Syria, and directing terrorist acts in nearby countries and beyond.

At the height of the Isis rampage

several million Syrians left Turkey, with Ankara doing little to stop them. Huge columns of refugees made their way to central Europe, where, in Germany, their support by the chancellor, Angela Merkel, drew opposition from Germany's right wing and fed ethnic nationalism across the continent.

Isis-led terror attacks in 2015 and 2016 in France, Belgium and Germany fuelled the resurgence of populism and ethno-nationalism.

"Immigration control was a central theme for Brexiters, as it was in Poland, France and Italy," said Rym Momtaz, at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Donald Trump ran for president on an anti-migrant platform, even banning Muslims from entering the US in the early stages of his administration. He showed little interest in addressing the aftermath of the conflict, insisting that the US withdrawal

in 2011 had put a line under the involvement of Washington.

Baghdad is now flush with new money, and the walls that divided the city to stem sectarian violence have mostly been taken down. But the state remains weak and prone to outside interests. Many large new hotels and restaurants are citadels to money-laundering. The country remains one of the most corrupt in the world and the rule of law feeble and randomly applied.

"We can buy cars and have better living standards, we have more freedoms than before," said Jassem Obeid, a teacher from the shrine city of Karbala. "But the region has become worse, especially for Syria."

The view from the mainly Sunni province of Salaheddine is worse. "The law is not strong now," said Fahih al-Obeidi. "It punishes some and spares others."

Griffin remains troubled by Iraq. "When people died, even though they were strangers, it affected me deeply. As a young marine I could look people in the eye and say they died fighting for their country. At some point I lost that, and just saw the deaths as profound wastes of life. Not just friends, or Americans, but I grieved for the massive amount of civilians who were often randomly plucked off the earth - only guilty of being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

'We can buy cars, we have more freedoms; but the region has become worse'

Jassem Obeid
Teacher in Karbala

Lies and abuse Moral failings tarnished Britain's reputation for a generation

Dan Sabbagh
Defence and security editor

It was a war that began in extreme controversy and in the course of which the moral reputation of British intelligence and the nation's armed forces was tarnished for a generation.

Before a shot was fired, British intelligence, led by MI6, produced flawed evidence about Saddam Hussein's supposed weapons of mass destruction, in turn simplified and amplified by the then prime minister, Tony Blair, including in his foreword to the notorious Iraq dossier of September 2002. It was shown not to be true after the initial invasion was over.

Sir John Chilcot, in his 2016 inquiry, concluded that not only had Blair gone too far but that the intelligence community did little to hold Downing Street back.

The intelligence failures lingered long in the memory, prompting widespread scepticism about agency predictions in the run-up to the war in Ukraine, in particular that Vladimir Putin would, without doubt, order an invasion. But others argue that the impact was more profound. Dan Jarvis, who served as a major in the Parachute Regiment in Iraq, and is now a Labour MP, said: "Rather than fading away, the damage done to public trust in 2003 has only become clearer with time. In retrospect it may have been only a milestone in a wider decline, but it has echoes in everything from the Brexit debate to the response to Covid - and the disastrous impunity of Boris Johnson."

The Saddam regime was defeated in a little over three weeks, and the coalition was often welcomed by Iraqi civilians. But it was not long before stories of abuse and torture emerged.

Baha Mousa, 26, an Iraqi who was working in a hotel as a receptionist, was detained by British soldiers from the 1st Battalion Queen's Lancashire Regiment in Basra in September 2003. Thirty-six hours later he was found dead with 93 external injuries, his face bloodied and distorted, his torso covered in swathes of bruising, and "a strangulation line across the throat", according to AT Williams, who wrote a book about the event.

Nor was it an isolated incident. A 2011 inquiry by Sir William Gage into Mousa's death said British soldiers inflicted "violent and cowardly" assaults on Iraqi civilians, subjecting them to "gratuitous" beatings - and that there was widespread ignorance of

what was permitted in handling prisoners of war. There were repeated incidents of hooding, where a bag is thrown over a detainee's head. The practice was banned in 1972 by Ted Heath, when he was prime minister, but some British soldiers admitted they were not aware of the order, suggesting a failure to enforce standards from the top.

Such accusations, remarkably, paled in comparison with what happened at the US-run prison at Abu Ghraib, where a shameful catalogue of abuse was revealed in April 2004. Detainees at the prison were tortured and humiliated, often sexually.

Abu Ghraib was part of a moral corruption that emerged as the "war on terror" continued. Some of the issues went beyond Iraq - as demonstrated by a report from the UK parliament's intelligence and security committee, published as recently as 2018, which concluded that MI6 officers had on two occasions been party to mistreatment of prisoners, witnessed it on 13 occasions, and benefited from intelligence supplied from people suspected of being tortured nearly 200 times.

The cross-party committee said "the UK saw itself as the poor relation to the US" and "was distinctly uncomfortable at the prospect of complaining". In other cases, MI6 was involved in abductions that led to suspected extremists being tortured. Such was the disgust that Eliza Manningham-Buller, the then head of MI5, complained about MI6's conduct to Blair.

At one point the accusations went too far. Claims that British soldiers had murdered insurgents and mutilated their bodies after a firefight in Iraq in 2004 were dismissed 10 years later by the al-Sweady inquiry. A British human rights lawyer had paid a middleman who found people willing to submit statements that turned out to be fictitious. The fiasco prompted a dramatic anti-human rights response by Conservative ministers.

A shutdown of the military unit investigating claims of abuse by UK forces in Iraq occurred in 2017. An effort followed to introduce a form of amnesty for British soldiers accused of war crimes while in Iraq, but the Overseas Operations Act eventually had to be amended to ensure that actions against torture continued.

Despite all the efforts to sweep the scandals under the carpet, the Ministry of Defence was still quietly paying compensation. In the year to November 2021 it paid several million pounds to settle 417 claims.

Palestinians enraged by 'inhuman' shooting of militant in Jenin raid

Ben Lynfield
Jerusalem

The shooting in the head of a motionless Palestinian militant during an Israeli raid on Jenin, in which three other people were killed, has enraged Palestinians as images of the incident spread across social media.

Ahmad Majdalani, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation executive committee, condemned the shooting on Thursday of Nidal Hazem, who was face down at the time. "This is a crime in the full sense of the word," he said.

The Israeli army said its raid, the latest on Jenin and its refugee camp in recent months, was "an intelligence-based counterterrorism activity" and had "neutralised" two suspected militants.

The Palestinian health ministry identified those killed as Omar Awadin, 16, Luay al-Zughair, 37, Hazem, 28, and Youssef Shreem, 29. Hamas's

armed wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, said Shreem belonged to their group and Islamic Jihad claimed Hazem as one of its members.

The raid was described by witnesses as an undercover operation in a crowded market area.

The Israeli army statement did not offer an explanation for why Hazem was shot in the head in what Breaking the Silence, an Israeli group of military veterans against the occupation, called an "extrajudicial execution".

Avner Gvoryahu, the head of the group, said the shooting was an example of a practice known as "verification of killing" that is part of Israel Defence Forces (IDF) training for special operations units.

"What we saw is very telling in terms of an unspeakable practice in the army," he said. The IDF denies that any such practice exists.

Palestinian and Israeli officials are due to meet in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, tomorrow for talks aimed at reducing tensions before Ramadan.

▼ Mourners attend the funeral of Palestinians killed in the latest Jenin raid by Israeli forces on Thursday

PHOTOGRAPH: IAAFAH ASHTIYEH/AF/GETTY



Majdalani, an ally of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, said: "The international community must... hold Israel responsible for its organised state terrorism." He said that not only must the security-force member who shot Hazem be held to account but also his commanders.

Ghassan Khatib, a former minister of labour in the Palestinian Authority who teaches at Birzeit University, said the "inhuman" shooting "only incites Palestinian youth for revenge".

The IDF spokesperson Richard Hecht did not give a clear answer when asked if an investigation would be opened. "I know the

visual is problematic. I'll know more next week. It's a special police force officer," he said.

The raid was part of Operation Break the Wave, which consists of incursions into West Bank towns and refugee camps with the stated goal of thwarting Palestinian attacks. It was launched a year ago after a string of Palestinian attacks, including one that killed three Israelis in a Tel Aviv bar which the army said was carried out by a relative of Hazem.

Twenty other Palestinians were wounded in Thursday's raid, four of them critically, according to the Palestinian ministry of health.

New Zealand's parliament joins TikTok ban

Tess McClure
Auckland

New Zealand is to ban TikTok from all parliamentary devices amid mounting security concerns over the app.

The country's MPs were informed yesterday that the Chinese-owned video-sharing app would be blocked from all parliamentary devices at the end of the month, and were told it had been "determined that the risks are not acceptable in the current parliament environment".

"The decision to block the TikTok application has been made based on our own analysis and following discussion with colleagues across government and internationally," the email reads.

The decision follows similar rulings by New Zealand's western allies. Earlier in the week, the UK government announced that TikTok would be immediately banned from ministers' and civil servants' mobile phones. The US, Canada and the European Commission already had bans in place.

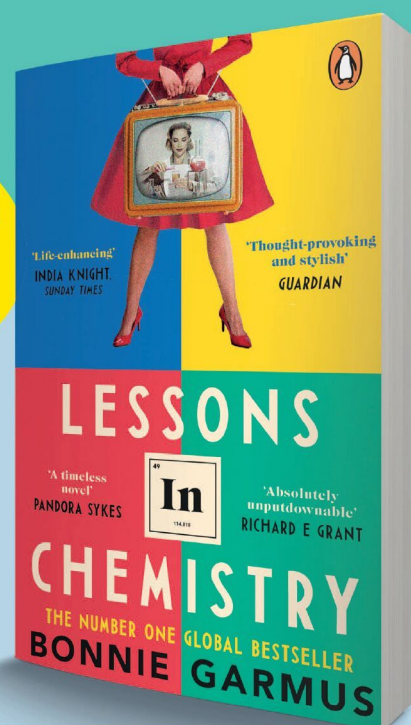
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The Guardian

A fantastic fox

Australia's five-year hunt for Rambo comes to an end

Angus Fontaine

He was the fantastic fox who derailed a multimillion-dollar plan to reintroduce endangered native species into one of Australia's largest forests. But after a five-year hunt that involved 10,400 traps, 3,500 baits, 73 stakeouts, 55 days of scent-tracking with dogs and 97 infrared cameras filming 40 hours a week, the red fox who was nicknamed Rambo is officially "no longer".

It means that, for the first time in a century, burrowing marsupials called greater bilbies are running wild in the north-west of New South Wales. The bilbies – of which there are believed fewer than 10,000 nationwide – are the first of six locally extinct or vulnerable species that the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service will reintroduce to the sprawling wilderness between Narrabri and Coonabarabran known as the Pilliga Scrub.

Next in line are bridled nailtail wallabies and brush-tailed bettongs, with the vulnerable plains mouse and western barred bandicoot to be reintroduced in June and September.

But it has been a long time coming. AWC operates the largest private and donor-funded sanctuaries in Australia. But none have faced the unique challenge that beset the 5,800-hectare conservation area in the Pilliga: a feral animal that could not be caught.

"We see it occasionally in large-brained placental carnivores," says

Dr Tim Flannery, who followed Rambo's story. "They don't become smarter than their human hunters but they're better evolved than their brethren. Waiting them out siege-style becomes the only option."

Pilliga operations manager Wayne Sparrow managed the hunt for Rambo for five years. "When we started fencing the enclosure in 2018, Rambo was just a kit and we reckon he lost his mother to a trap and a sibling to a pesticide called 1080 soon after. That was his education, and it made him this reclusive, shy, intuitive animal. But he was no typical fox."



◀ Greater bilbies are the first of six locally extinct or vulnerable species that will be reintroduced to Pilliga Scrub
PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS24/ALAMY

▼ The reclusive red fox who was nicknamed Rambo evaded capture for four-and-a-half years before apparently dying in floods



▲ A greater bilby released in NSW

10,400

The number of traps set as part of attempts to capture Rambo over the course of the five-year hunt

Sparrow says Rambo – named after Sylvester Stallone's unkillable action hero – didn't move with the cycles of the moon or use the same path twice. Nor could he be lured with baits like most foxes or trapped using snares like other feral animals. "I came to respect him," Sparrow says. "I knew I had to bring my A-game to ever catch him."

Smuggled into Australia in 1835 to be hunted, the red fox's adaptability and intelligence allowed it to spread quickly across the nation. Today, Melbourne is estimated to have 20 foxes per square kilometre and Sydney 10.

Last March, it was estimated that Australia's 1.7 million foxes kill about 367 million mammals and 111 million birds every year.

In the Pilliga, as the hunt for Rambo stretched into years, Sparrow became increasingly desperate. He brought in Indigenous trackers, ex-military assassins, soft-jaw trap specialists, even a hunting-dog breeder who claimed to have bred a "beagle-kelpie fox-finder" hybrid.

"At first every shooter and trapper wanted Rambo as a trophy," Sparrow says. "But every one of them came, tried and left empty-handed." Sparrow himself spent countless nights on a perch in the Pilliga with lure boxes laid and a thermal rifle at the ready. But to no avail.

Now, despite Sparrow's best efforts, nature appears to have done what he and a long line of hunters, scientists and rangers could not, and outfoxed Rambo at last. Camera-trap footage last caught sight of Rambo on 9 October 2022. Since then, despite intensive monitoring and tracking, no evidence of the wily fox has been found. It is suspected Rambo died during one of two flooding events that hit the Pilliga in October last year.

"I am 100% confident he is gone," Sparrow told the Guardian. "After a huge volume of work and a lot of stress, it's over. Rambo will always be in my thoughts but he's finally left my dreams."

In the years Rambo delayed a full-scale reintroduction, AWC released 60 bilbies into a temporary breeding area of 680 hectares in 2018. Ecologists now estimate the population to be 335. Bridled nailtail wallabies have flourished similarly, with 42 originals now a mob of 148.

This month, after adhering to eradication monitoring periods which require a fenced area to be clear of feral predators for a minimum of three months, AWC officially declared the enclosure "feral-free" and moved these pioneering colonies into the wider Pilliga.

"Bilbies have lived in Australia for 15m years," said Dr Vicki Stokes, an AWC ecologist. "The timing [for their reintroduction] is perfect. Good conditions in the forest over the last few years have meant that both populations of bilbies and bridled nailtail wallabies are doing exceptionally well and it's good to get them out into the wider area so they can flourish."

Varadkar 'sorry' for joke about Clinton's affair with Lewinsky

Rory Carroll

Ireland correspondent

Ireland's taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, has apologised for making an apparent joke about Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky during an event in Washington.

Varadkar's comment on Thursday, the eve of St Patrick's Day

celebrations, risked overshadowing his meeting with Joe Biden at the White House for the traditional handing over of a bowl of shamrock to the US president, an important day in the Irish-American political calendar.

The taoiseach departed from a prepared script when speaking to people involved in the Washington Ireland Programme, which teaches career skills to young people. Reminiscing

about his stint as a US House of Representatives intern in 2000, during the last year of Clinton's presidency, Varadkar said it was a time "when some parents would have had cause for concern about what would happen to interns in Washington".

The comment was widely viewed as a reference to Clinton's affair with Lewinsky while she was a White House intern in the mid 1990s. Hours earlier Varadkar had shared a stage with Hillary Clinton at another event.

A spokesperson for Varadkar later apologised on his behalf, saying: "He made an ill-judged, off-the-cuff remark which he regrets. He



▲ Leo Varadkar with Hillary Clinton hours before his joke about interns

apologises for any offence caused to anyone concerned."

The blunder could dog the taoiseach when he again meets and shares platforms with the Clintons during their visit to Ireland next month to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement. Biden also plans to visit.

Senior Democrats this week urged visiting Democratic Unionist party figures to restore power-sharing in Northern Ireland in the wake of the Windsor Framework, saying the new agreement had addressed the party's concerns over post-Brexit trading arrangements.

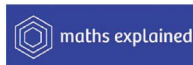
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NHS Pensions – beware there could still be tax to pay

This week's announcement by the Chancellor attempted to address tax issues faced by many NHS employees. Why? Because many grades with higher end salaries have faced huge tax penalties if their deemed annual contribution known as the Annual Allowance (AA), or total value of their pension at retirement was over £1,073,000 the Lifetime Allowance (LTA).

The Chancellor has now abolished the LTA cap completely wiping out the previous LTA high tax penalties. Good news? No more tax to worry about whilst building up your NHS Pension you may think, sadly not.

Devil is in the detail
Although the amount of 'pot' you can build up is now uncapped, the maximum funding into your pension each year is still subject to an Annual Allowance cap. That has been increased from £40,000 to £60,000 a year. This means if you are a member of the 2015 NHS Scheme (only), an employee can earn an absolute maximum of £196,869pa before breaching the new funding limit.

What if you breach the new Annual Allowance Limit?

Many will still face the old problem of having to assess and manage any annual tax liability if their gross earnings tip their deemed annual contribution into their NHS Pension pot above the new £60,000 limit,



especially when multiple scheme membership and inflation are factored in. Beware – with many employees still likely to tip over the annual limit owing to their earnings driven up by overtime, inflationary and pay grade uplifts, individual case-by-case assessment is still needed to tactically tax plan your NHS earning and benefits. Don't be led by tabloid headlines into thinking your NHS pension no longer attracts tax charges – it pays to get advice.

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Business

Fresh pressure on Credit Suisse shares as fears grow of crisis in global banking

Rupert Neate

Wealth correspondent

Credit Suisse shares have come under renewed pressure despite attempts by central banks and politicians to calm fears about a crisis in the global banking industry sparked by the collapse of two US banks this week.

Shares in Credit Suisse, Switzerland's second-largest bank, fell 8% yesterday despite securing a £45bn emergency loan from the Swiss National Bank days earlier to shore up its liquidity after a week of panic.

New figures showed that more than \$450m (£370m) was withdrawn from Credit Suisse's US and European managed funds between 13 and 15 March as retail and institutional investors pulled their money from the embattled lender, according to data from Morningstar Direct.

Shares in the US bank First Republic fell 25% despite it securing \$30bn of emergency funds from the largest US banks in a deal cobbled together by the treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, and the Federal Reserve chairman, Jerome Powell.

Growing unease in the market – which has seen Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank collapse in the US this week – led the European Central Bank to hold an emergency meeting yesterday to discuss the tumult.

The ECB supervisors, who have held two unplanned meetings this week, saw no contagion to euro-zone banks, a source familiar with the meeting told Reuters. Banking



▲ Credit Suisse is Switzerland's second largest bank PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN WEKUMUTH/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

deposits across the sector were said to be stable. A spokesperson for the ECB declined to comment.

The German finance minister, Christian Lindner, also sought to reassure investors and the public that there was not a "systemic financial crisis" and said the situation was not likely to lead to a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis.

Lindner said the German financial

watchdog, BaFin, and the Bundesbank, its central bank, were "closely and carefully" observing the situation, which he said had been marked by specific problems at individual banks.

Joe Biden called on Congress yesterday to allow regulators to impose tougher penalties on the executives of failed banks, including clawing back pay and bonuses and making

'Congress must act to impose tougher penalties... for mismanagement'

Joe Biden
US president

it easier to bar them from working in the industry again.

"No one is above the law and strengthening accountability is an important deterrent to prevent mismanagement in the future," Biden said. "Congress must act to impose tougher penalties for senior bank executives whose mismanagement contributed to their institution failing."

The US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation can only claw back the compensation of banking executives if they act with "recklessness" or "wilful or continuing disregard" for their bank's health. Biden wants Congress to allow the regulator to impose penalties for "negligent" executives – a lower legal threshold.

The largest US banks agreed on Thursday night to pump \$30bn of emergency funds into First Republic, a San Francisco-based bank that experts warned could also have been teetering on the brink of collapse.

However, the rescue deal cobbled together by Yellen, Powell and the JPMorgan Chase chief executive, Jamie Dimon, failed to reassure investors. First Republic's shares, which have lost three-quarters of their value since Wednesday, fell by 25% yesterday.

In a joint statement, the 11 banks that stumped up the money – which includes Bank of America, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley – said: "The actions of America's largest banks reflect their confidence in the country's banking system."

In total, banks have borrowed about \$300bn from the US Federal Reserve in the past week, the central bank said. Nearly half the money – \$143bn – went to holding companies for Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. The Fed did not identify the banks that had received the other half of the funding or say how many of them had done so.

Q&A What's going on and is this 2008 repeated?

What is happening in the markets?

Severe stress in the global financial system has become apparent in the past week. In the US, Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) was the first domino to fall last Friday, followed by New York's Signature Bank on Sunday. Wall Street's biggest lenders clubbed together to rescue First Republic Bank after its shares crashed, pumping \$30bn (£25bn) into it. In Europe, the Swiss central bank was forced to offer a £45bn lifeline to Credit Suisse.

Although there were specific problems at SVB and Credit Suisse, there is evidence of wider distress.

Every week, the Federal Reserve, the US central bank, provides details of the emergency help it has provided to lenders over the past seven days. In the last week, this rose from \$15bn to \$318bn – well in excess of the \$130bn at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and not far

short of the \$437bn at the height of the banking crisis following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008.

Are we in for a repeat of the global financial crisis of 15 years ago?

It is too early to say at this stage, but there are reasons to be hopeful that a repeat can be avoided. First, banks are in better shape than they were in 2008, when many were operating with only small amounts of capital to cover the losses resulting from the meltdown in the US sub-prime mortgage market.

Second, in 2008 the entire global financial system froze up because nobody knew how big the losses were and which banks were most exposed. As yet, there is no sign of that, and banks are forced to report regularly on the quality of their asset portfolios, also undergoing severe stress tests.

Finally, central banks such as the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank have set up lines of credit to provide help to banks with cashflow problems. That said, the global financial crisis started on a small scale and quickly escalated.

What is more, it is clear banks – and other financial institutions – are nursing serious losses.

Why are the banks making losses?

Central banks responded to the global financial crisis in two ways: they slashed interest rates and pumped money into the banking system through the process known as quantitative easing (QE). In effect, central banks bought bonds – mostly issued by governments – and exchanged them for cash that found its way into the economy. A further round of interest rate cuts and QE occurred at the start of the Covid pandemic.

Central banks have reversed course due to rising inflation. They have raised interest rates and started to sell bonds. Bond prices rose as a result of the QE programmes but have fallen sharply over the past year as QE has been unwound. The aggressive action by central banks has left commercial banks nursing big and unexpected losses. SVB had invested heavily in long-dated US government bonds, but as rates rose sharply the value of its bond prices fell. When customers started asking for their cash back, it forced SVB to sell bonds at a heavy loss, blowing a hole in its balance sheet.

What happens next?

Central banks are in a bind because there is a tension between their two

main functions: to keep inflation low and maintain financial stability. Raising interest rates and reversing QE are designed to slow down growth and so bring inflation down, but even though the ECB went ahead with a planned interest rate rise on Thursday the cost of doing so is that some banks are struggling to cope with the tougher conditions.

Markets now assume interest rates will peak sooner and at a lower level than they thought before the crisis at SVB blew up, and will be waiting to see how the Fed and Bank of England respond with interest rate decisions next week. The case for not raising borrowing costs further is that only a fraction of the effect of the higher interest rates of the past year has so far been felt, and that commercial banks are already responding to problems at SVB and elsewhere by reducing lending. Risks of recession have markedly risen in the past week.

Larry Elliott

\$318bn

Amount of emergency help given to lenders by the US Federal Reserve in the past seven days, up from \$15bn

Central banks must keep interest rates high to combat inflation, says OECD

Phillip Inman

Central banks should maintain the fight against inflation with high interest rates despite fears of a global banking crash, according to the OECD, which said the UK would be the only economy in the G20 apart from Russia to shrink this year.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said it was concerned that inflation remained stubbornly high in many of its 39 members countries and urged central banks to persist with interest rate increases when necessary.

Alvaro Pereira, the Paris-based organisation's interim chief economist, said companies in the services sector were continuing to push through big price rises, even though wholesale energy and food prices

were falling. He added: "Services price growth has remained high, pushing up core inflation, which is why we believe central banks must remain vigilant."

Some economists have said further interest rate rises by big central banks, including the Bank of England, would undermine the stability of the global financial system, which has become accustomed to ultra-low borrowing costs since the 2008 financial crash. The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in the US, the sale of its UK offshoot to HSBC for £1 and the rescue of Credit Suisse after being thrown a £45bn lifeline by the Swiss central bank have spooked global markets.

The European Central Bank president, Christine Lagarde, said the fight against inflation remained a priority after announcing a 0.5 percentage point increase in the interest rate covering the 19-member euro bloc on

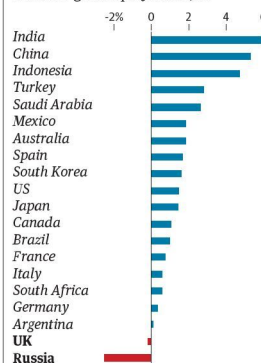
Thursday. She said the bank had the financial tools and necessary reserves should there be European banks in need of extra resources.

The OECD, which forms a triumvirate of global economic institutions with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, said all major EU economies would expand in 2023 at a stronger pace than it forecast last year, leaving Britain and Russia as the only members of the G20 group of wealthy nations to suffer a decline.

In its half-yearly outlook, it said the UK forecast had improved slightly against its prediction in November of a 0.4% contraction, largely in response to falling gas prices, but would still shrink by 0.2% this year.

Under the heading "A fragile recovery", the OECD said it expected a further rebound in consumer confidence and business output this year across its member states, but not

The UK and Russia are the only G20 economies predicted to shrink in 2023
Real GDP growth projections, %



Source: OECD interim economic outlook 113 database

Russia, as well as smaller nations such as EU states. It said there were "more positive signs" now food and energy prices were falling back, and the Chinese economy had fully reopened, but the recovery from the pandemic would remain slow while central banks kept interest rates high and the Ukraine war persisted. Last year the organisation said the UK would be the economy hit hardest by the war.

Unlike the economic forecasts by the Office for Budget Responsibility, the OECD expects growth in the UK to remain weak next year, rising to just 0.9%. The OBR, which provides independent forecasts for the Treasury, said this week it estimated the UK economy would grow by 1.9%. The UK has one of the highest rates of inflation, the biggest reliance on gas and the lowest labour productivity - defined as output per hour - among its major competitors, Pereira said.

Inflation in the UK is expected to fall from above 10% this year, higher than France, Spain, the US and Japan, to be among the lowest in the G20 by the end of the year at less than 3%.

There are wide gaps between the forecasts for the UK next year by the OECD, the OBR and the Bank of England, which expects GDP growth to be only 0.4% in 2024.

A year on How P&O Ferries got away with illegal sackings

Gwyn Topham

Transport correspondent

On a bright March morning a year ago, it took just a few hours for P&O Ferries to bring the careers of its seafaring crew to a shocking halt. Recalling the fleet to port, it summarily sacked 786 people, many by video message - with foreign agency staff lined up to take their place.

Politicians were united in outrage. Boris Johnson, then the prime minister, said: "P&O plainly aren't going to get away with it."

A year on, plainly, P&O has got away with it. The brand may now be synonymous with corporate cynicism, and a civil investigation rumbles on. But no one was prosecuted, meaningful reform has yet to happen, P&O's cross-Channel ferry business is gearing up for another summer as market leader - and there has been no sanction against either the firm or its owner, DP World.

Nor indeed, against the directors: in a second jaw-dropping act the following week, the company's chief executive, Peter Hebblethwaite, told MPs the company had knowingly acted illegally and would do so again. While ministers insisted his head must roll, he remains firmly in his £325,000-a-year post.

Few seafarers from P&O have been so lucky. Sacked workers have been restrained from speaking out by nondisclosure clauses in redundancy agreements, signed to a short deadline that traded enhanced payoffs for their legal rights. Steve (not his real name) was one long-serving seafarer who reluctantly took P&O's money. "If you didn't sign, you had a lot to lose," he says.

No one on the ships saw it coming, he says. "I didn't think anybody would stoop that low. We'd gone through Covid, all the restrictions, two rounds of redundancy. Then it looked like light at the end of the tunnel with strong bookings only to find they'd decided to sack everybody."

"I've been in dark places. I can't get my head around it. I'd always been a loyal employee - decades of work - then a short video: 'You're sacked.'"

Bill (also a pseudonym) was an able seaman on the Pride of Kent. He says: "It still rankles, the fact they got away with it. It still hurts."

Some, including officers and engineers, have returned, now part of the gig economy on short-term contracts. Bill has not worked since, and says of former crewmates he knows: "More or less everybody who was laid off is struggling, picking up jobs piecemeal, reverting to agency work from a steady job. Their whole life has been downgraded."

The one seafarer who did not settle was John Lansdown, a sous-chef on the Pride of Canterbury.



Pornhub owner MindGeek sold to private equity firm after illegal content row

Dan Milmo
Global technology editor

The company behind the website Pornhub, which has been accused of hosting illegal content, has been sold to a Canadian private equity firm for an undisclosed sum.

MindGeek, the subject of a new Netflix documentary that charts the controversies surrounding the pornography site, has been acquired by Ethical Capital Partners (ECP), a firm that targets industries requiring "principled ethical leadership".

Last year, the chief executive and chief operating officer of MindGeek resigned after an investigation in the New Yorker found non-consensual and underage videos had appeared on Pornhub. However, the company denied the resignations were linked to the article and said it had

"comprehensive and effective" content policies.

Solomon Friedman, ECP's founding partner, said: "We are engaged with the team at MindGeek and with stakeholders, including content creators, advocates, law enforcement, civil society partners and policy-makers, to inform our efforts and strengthen MindGeek's secure platforms, going beyond legal and regulatory obligations."

He told the Financial Times that criticism of MindGeek, as well as lawsuits targeting the company, reflected a misunderstanding of the company's content safeguards. MindGeek,

which is headquartered in Luxembourg but has its main office in Montreal, Canada, claims to have more than 115 million daily visitors to its sites. "I want to engage regularly with stakeholders, including the media," he said. Friedman added that MindGeek's current executive team would continue to run the company but declined to reveal their identities.

"At this point we are not identifying the current executives, as there is an unfortunate stigma [attached to the industry]," he said.

ECP's advisory board includes a former adult industry professional and an academic specialising in the pornography industry.

Pornhub was cut off by Visa and Mastercard's payment networks in 2020 after investigations identified unlawful content on the platform. MindGeek has since said Mastercard reinstated access to its subscription sites but both the payments firms suspended ties with the company's advertisement arm, TrafficJunky, after a lawsuit raised questions over whether they could be facilitating the distribution of underage material.

Visa said it did not permit the use of its payment network for illegal activity, while Mastercard said it had "zero tolerance" for illegal activity.

115m

Number of daily visitors to sites run by MindGeek, which has its headquarters in Luxembourg

Barclays ex-boss Staley to face US deposition over ties with Epstein

Rupert Neate

Jes Staley, the former boss of Barclays, will face a two-day deposition next week over allegations that he knew about Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking operation.

JP Morgan, the US bank where Staley worked and had the convicted sex offender as a client, said it would depose him next Thursday and Friday as part of its lawsuit alleging he had concealed crucial information about the late financier.

It has accused Staley of "intentional and outrageous conduct" in concealing key information and called for him to be made liable for penalties the US bank may face as a result of two separate lawsuits accusing it of facilitating Epstein's trafficking of women and girls by

failing to spot red flags. JP Morgan is being sued by prosecutors in the US Virgin Islands, where much of the abuse is said to have taken place at a home owned by Epstein, and by a woman known only as Jane Doe 1.

Those lawsuits, while aimed at JP Morgan, have claimed Staley "observed victims personally", including "visiting young girls at Epstein's apartments" and exchanging 1,200 emails with him that included photos of young women.

Lawyers for JP Morgan told a federal judge in New York yesterday that Staley was scheduled to be deposed over two days beginning on 23 March. The judge set the trial date for the US Virgin Islands and Jane Doe cases against JP Morgan for 23 October.

Staley has denied any involvement in Epstein's alleged crimes.

Announcing its lawsuit against Staley last week, JP Morgan said: "While the conduct Epstein was accused of is despicable, the lawsuits against [JP Morgan] are misplaced and without merit. The plaintiffs have made troubling allegations concerning the conduct of our former employee Jes Staley, and if true he should be held responsible for his actions."

Additional reporting **Agencies**



► **Nautilus International** union members rally outside parliament earlier this week

PHOTOGRAPH: AIFUN SALCIZUMA
PRESS WIRE/REX/
SHUTTERSTOCK

◄ **P&O ferries** docked in the port of Dover on 18 March last year, the day hundreds of staff were sacked

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY KAIN/PA

'More or less everybody who was laid off is struggling. Their whole life has been downgraded'

Bill
Sacked seafarer



He took P&O to a tribunal and eventually won a bigger sum, which he donated to charity.

"I needed the money, but it was a point of principle," Lansdown says. He wishes more had followed his lead. "If several hundred people were willing to hold P&O up in a tribunal for years, they may well have thought again."

"We didn't just lose our jobs. We spent half our lives on those ships - the people we sailed with would become a second family. P&O valued it at zero and broke it all."

The replacement agency crew, drawn from around the world, earn considerably less and work longer stints on board - at least a fortnight of consecutive shifts rather than the previous seven-day rotations. Some are working up to 17 weeks straight and earn less than £4 an hour, pay slips seen by unions show.

A P&O spokesperson said safety was paramount, that the company paid above the International Labour Organization minimum and all its crew had appropriate qualifications.

Darren Jones, the Labour MP who chaired the extraordinary Commons hearing of the business and transport committees, vividly

remembers Hebblethwaite's "albeit honest but remarkable answer" to their questions. "He said: 'I know what the law is. I broke it on purpose. And I would do it again.' Which essentially is saying to parliament: 'What are you going to do about it?'"

"But ministers haven't done anything. Those 800 workers have not had any form of justice. He's gotten away with it, and I wouldn't be surprised if he got a bonus. The whole thing basically stinks."

The government highlights a nine-point plan announced in the aftermath, including the seafarers' wages bill progressing through parliament. A spokesperson said: "We reacted swiftly and decisively against P&O Ferries' appalling treatment of its staff."

"Having brought forward legislation to ensure seafarers are paid at least an equivalent to the UK national minimum wage, and establishing a new statutory code to deter 'fire and rehire', we are now working with our near European neighbours to further protect their welfare and pay."

Unions are not impressed. Martyn Gray, of Nautilus International, says: "What P&O

did was exploit loopholes in trade union law. The government made some very strong statements about holding them to account and making sure it never happens again. But it could happen."

A TUC report published yesterday concurs that rogue employers now have a "free pass to act with impunity".

Tim Sharp, the senior policy officer for employment rights at the TUC, says ministers have "totally failed" to ensure better workplace protections. "There is nothing stopping another P&O scandal from happening again."

The new code of practice aims to deter fire and rehire by entitling mistreated workers to 25% more compensation; arguably the kind of calculation P&O itself made and decided was worth it.

P&O Ferries says it was losing £100m a year after being undercut on the Channel by Irish Ferries and claims the sackings "improved our service and boosted our competitiveness".

Its owner, the Dubai-based DP World, this week announced record profits of \$1.8bn (£1.5bn), and continues to be a key player in Rishi Sunak's planned freetrade. P&O would not confirm if Hebblethwaite had received a bonus.

Hebblethwaite declined to be interviewed, but a P&O spokesperson said: "Significant changes in the last year have saved this business, including the 2,200 jobs we secured in coastal communities across the UK."

Darren Procter, the national secretary of RMT, who led protests in Dover on the day of the sackings, says: "As an island nation, we should be employing seafarers on the same kind of conditions as individuals on land. The exploitation is hidden away."

A year on, without meaningful action against P&O, he says: "Now every seafarer is under threat."

Money

Holiday scams 'Bank didn't stop £6,500 transfer despite my pleas'

A Briton's nightmare over a Greek villa highlights the dangers of online bookings. **Miles Brignall** tells her story and explains how to stay safe

A woman scammed out of £6,500 while trying to book a Greek holiday villa has described begging her bank to halt the money transfer she had made to the fraudsters, only to be told by staff that there was nothing they could do.

Londoner Sarah Graham* says that, looking back on it, she cannot believe she fell for a holiday property scam that Guardian Money first highlighted in 2013. She says she feels let down by the holiday accommodation firm Vrbo but even more so by the bank.

With Easter only weeks away and at a time when many people's thoughts are turning to summer getaways, her case is a warning to anyone thinking of booking holiday accommodation that they need to be on their guard, as the sector has been increasingly targeted by fraudsters.

Here we outline what happened to Graham and offer our tips and advice for how to keep yourself safe.

Graham says that for more than six hours after she had authorised a €7,155 (£6,500) payment to a Bank of America account in the US, the money continued to sit in her First Direct bank account. When she received an email an hour after making the payment warning her that the villa's listing on Vrbo had been removed for security reasons, she immediately phoned First Direct back to halt the transfer.

But she says that despite her pleas, the bank's 24-hour calls staff could not, or would not, intervene. The money finally left her account just before the fraud team started work the following morning at 8am.

It arguably makes something of a mockery of First Direct's claim that it has "an 'always on' approach to fraud prevention".

Her case is a reminder to others

booking holiday accommodation to only use authorised payment systems that protect your money if the listing turns out to be fraudulent.

The bank says its staff asked her about possible fraud and said that once the transfer was made, it could not be stopped.

Graham had logged on to the website of Vrbo, which used to trade under the Owners Direct and HomeAway brands and advertises thousands of holiday villas to rent.

Having found what looked to be a good-value villa on the island of Mykonos, she had used the "contact owner" button on the site to ask some questions, and went away to check if the dates were still suitable.

"When the next day I went to book the villa, the price had mysteriously shot up, so I went back to the 'owner' by email to ask what was going on. I was informed that a promotional offer had just ended and that was the reason the price had risen so much."

At this stage, she says, the people purporting to own the villa said they might be able to do Graham a deal if she was prepared to move outside Vrbo's email system, and to email directly.

"Alarm bells should have been ringing but I assumed they just wanted to save some commission. In the end, I was offered what seemed like a good price – a saving of £800 – but I had to sign up very quickly and pay the full amount. Looking back, it was all about pressuring me into making the payment. I had a lot going on at the time – and, having paid for holiday accommodation in this way before – I decided to just get it done and make the payment. It would be one less thing on my plate."

However, within an hour of her making the 11.30pm bank transfer via First Direct's call centre, an email arrived from Vrbo warning that the property listing had been "falsely represented", and as a result it had been removed from its websites.

The property would not be reactivated and would no longer be available to book, the email stated, before advising anyone who had made a payment to "stop any



Driving up costs

Tourists face huge rise in car hire prices this summer

People planning to hire a car abroad this summer typically face having to pay almost 60% more than they did before the pandemic.

New figures for six popular destinations show average car rental prices are continuing to go up, with the average cost coming in at about £565 for a week's hire.

The figures from iCarhireinsurance.com, which provides policies to cover the excesses imposed by hire firms, indicate that families going to the Dalaman area of Turkey will pay an average of £461 for a week of car hire in the first week of August – more than 50% more than last year.

Car hire prices spiralled in 2022 after companies sold off stock during the pandemic due to a collapse in demand. When business returned after the end of restrictions, companies found it hard to replace the vehicles due to a global shortage of semiconductors.

The iCarhireinsurance.com

analysis put the cost of hiring a medium car, such as a VW Golf or Peugeot 308, in Barcelona between 29 July and 5 August at about £590.

If you booked the car at a similar time last year, the bill would have been about £480. And in 2019, before the pandemic hit, it would have cost just £258.

The average price for a week at the peak of holiday season is now £565, up from £357 before the pandemic – a rise of 58%.

Costs rose sharply last year as passengers returned to rental



▲ Car rental costs in Barcelona rose sharply in only a few months last year

forecourts, with some companies buying vehicles at inflated prices due to the shortages. Some places look to be cheaper this summer than during the same period last year – such as Crete and – but overall, costs are up 5%.

Tourists are generally advised to book well in advance to get the best deals. According to the website, the price of a Barcelona summer rental went up from £480 in February last year to £609 a few months later in May.

Ernesto Suarez, the chief executive of iCarhireinsurance.com, says the highs of last year could return. "If demand outstrips supply again like it did last summer, we could see prices rocket as we head towards the peak months of the year, so it is worth securing your vehicle as soon as possible. Many companies offer free 48-hour cancellation, so you can still change your booking if prices fall," he says.

Shane Hickey

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▲ Sarah Graham thought she was booking a villa on Mykonos, but the listing turned out to be a scam
PHOTO: SVEN HANSCH/GETTY IMAGES/EYEM

conversations with the host and to contact their credit card or other payment provider immediately to stop or reverse any payments”.

In a state of panic - it was now past 1am - Graham called First Direct's 24-hour call centre to get them to stop the payment. She was heartened by the fact that she could see that the £6,500 she had sent to the fraudsters was still in her account.

“What happened next was ridiculous, and I am still angry about it now. Having listened to me saying I had been the victim of a scam, the bank staff said there was nothing they could do to halt the transfer - even after I explained that this money was going to criminals. I was instructed to call the fraud department when it opened at 8am. As you can imagine, I didn't get much sleep that night,” she says.

By the time 8am came, the money had gone. In the intervening weeks, she has learned that First

Direct tried to recall the money - but not until three days later. It was unsuccessful. Since then, she says, all her attempts to get some answers, or some kind of redress from the bank, have drawn a blank.

“They have been about as useless as they could be,” she claims.

For its part, Vrbo has come good and, after the Guardian raised the case with the company, which is part of the Expedia group, it has now refunded Graham the £6,500 she lost.

“We realised an error incorrectly allowed this listing to bypass our stringent technology solutions that detect fraudulent activity and go live on our platform. In



▲ First Direct staff said they could do nothing to stop the payment

Protect yourself How to avoid scams

Scammers post fake listings of properties complete with glamorous photos - either mocked up, or stolen from a legitimate listing. They will typically price them below the market rate and then wait for inquiries to come in.

Most accommodation websites such as Vrbo, Airbnb and so on have internal email systems. The scammers' aim is to get you to communicate outside these, directly via an email.

The lure is a cheaper price, or previously unavailable dates - but only if you book “direct” and pay upfront in full via a bank transfer.

One of the reasons that Airbnb has been so successful is its internal payments system - the host does not get paid until you check in. So this is why you should always use it when booking on Airbnb.

Vrbo initially did not offer the same system but it now has its own “book with confidence guarantee”. This promises to refund you if the listing turns out to be fraudulent. It tells customers: “When you pay through Vrbo, we protect your rental payment against fraud. If your payment ends up in the hands of someone other than the host, we'll pay you back.”

Check the house exists using Google Maps. Try to go with listings that have good feedback and, most importantly, don't send money unless you have spoken to the host and you are as satisfied as you can be that it is all genuine.

If you think this is alarmist, holidaymakers have found themselves locked out of villas they thought they had booked.

In this case, [Graham] paid for the booking off the Vrbo platform, which means the payment is not protected under our book with confidence guarantee. However, after reviewing the situation, Vrbo has decided to issue a full refund to her in the hope that her next Vrbo experience is seamless,” it said in a statement.

First Direct says that protecting customers from scams “is a priority for us,” and that when investigating a case, it takes guidance from the contingent reimbursement model code and “works hard to ensure fair and reasonable outcomes for our customers”.

It adds: “Although we are unable to refund the customer, we have taken steps to recall the funds from the beneficiary bank, which requires proof the transaction was fraud to recall the payment. We are still working with the customer to see if we can resolve this and to obtain the information needed for the recall.”

The bank has also offered Graham £100 to compensate her for its service failures.

*Not her real name

Income tax

Here's how Jeremy Hunt's 'stealth' rise will affect you

Millions of Britons face paying basic or higher-rate tax for the first time. **Zoe Wood** explains the extra costs and what people can do

The government's decision to freeze income tax thresholds means nearly 3 million low- and middle-income Britons will have to pay basic or higher-rate tax for the first time this year while existing taxpayers will also have to stump up more.

There was no mention of this in Jeremy Hunt's budget speech but that is because he had already said in November that personal tax thresholds are going to stay the same until 2028.

However, on Thursday the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) thinktank issued new figures showing what this is likely to mean for people. The freezing of income tax and national insurance allowances and thresholds will cost most basic-rate taxpayers £500 from April and most higher-rate taxpayers £1,000. Those who only move into tax or into a higher rate would face a smaller increase.

Freezing tax thresholds is an under-the-radar way of raking in extra billions to boost the Treasury's coffers, and means workers do not feel the full benefit of a pay rise at a time when the cost of living has soared.

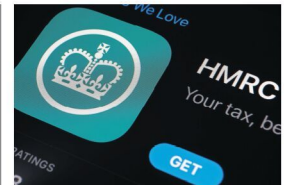
Traditionally tax brackets are adjusted to keep pace with inflation; however, they have been frozen in cash terms since April 2021. This means that as incomes rise, more low earners are pulled into paying the 20% basic-rate income tax (which kicks in at £12,571) and those with earnings nearing £50,000 tip into the higher 40% rate (which kicks in at £50,271). (Note, Scotland's income tax rates and thresholds are set by the Scottish parliament.)

1.7m

People will have to pay income tax for the first time after the personal allowance remained frozen, says IFS

£1,000

Annual amount the freeze will cost most higher-rate taxpayers from April, according to the IFS



▲ HMRC is keeping personal income tax thresholds the same until 2028

The fiscal drag net will bring in an extra 1.7 million basic-rate taxpayers and 1.2 million higher-rate taxpayers in the new financial year, which starts next month, according to the IFS but the ranks of new recruits will continue to swell.

At an individual level, if a person is making £51,000 and receives an annual pay rise of 3%, without adjusting personal allowances and thresholds to take account of inflation, they will have paid an additional £8,632 in income tax after six years, with their annual tax bill rising from £8,444 this tax year to £11,791 in the 2027-28 tax year, according to Blick Rothenberg, an advisory firm.

Fiscal drag also has implications for child benefit. The £50,000 threshold at which point higher earners start having child benefit clawed back has been unchanged since the measure was introduced in 2013, meaning more parents are having to pay some of it back.

“Fiscal drag is unfortunately very hard to plan for,” Robert Pullen, a partner at Blick Rothenberg, says.

Individuals should make sure they are accessing all of the reliefs and allowances available.

This includes the personal savings allowance, which is £1,000 for a basic-rate taxpayer and £500 for a higher-rate taxpayer.

It is also possible to claim tax relief for charitable donations or pension contributions, which can extend the basic-rate band limit.

Also, think about holding your investments in a tax-efficient way, such as through Isas and jointly with partners, which could double the allowances available, he adds.

Consider putting more money into your pension if you can, says Sarah Coles, the head of personal finance at the investment firm Hargreaves Lansdown.

“It's worth considering whether you can pay in more than you are at the moment. Contributions to pensions attract tax relief at your highest marginal rate, and the first 25% taken from the pension is usually tax free,” she adds.

Consumer champions

Zoe Wood

We got a tax rebate out of the blue – what is going on?

I wish to bring to your attention what seems to me to be an income tax refund scam.

My daughter SW received a letter out of the blue from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) telling her she was entitled to a tax refund of £60.40 and that a cheque had been sent to Ensign Advisory.

She has never heard of this company, and was then surprised to receive a cheque for just £8.66.

She contacted HMRC to ask about the discrepancy between the cheque to Ensign and the payment, and was told it had a signed document from her giving authority to the company to deal with her tax affairs. My daughter categorically did not sign any such document, but HMRC will not provide a copy without going through a subject access request.

She has tried to contact Ensign but without success. The letter sent by the firm states it has sent an email that provides a breakdown of the “claim”, but she has not received it.

Reviews on Trustpilot suggest there are many people who have had a similar experience with this company.

IW, by email

This rebate was a surprise for SW not only because the resulting cheque was so pitiful, but because she says she had not applied for it in the first place.

Ensign Advisory is an agent used by a company called Total Tax Claims. The latter says an online application for working from home tax relief was filled out by SW on its Totaltaxrefunds.co.uk website (you reach this site via clicking on ads on social media). It adds that the application was confirmed by email and text, although your daughter says she did not get them.

Whatever its origin, the payout was reduced as per Ensign's fee structure which, the terms & conditions on its website explain, is a massive 36% of the refund issued by HMRC plus a flat administration fee of £30 on top.

This resulted in a deduction of £51.71, with the remaining balance of £8.66 sent to her.



▲ HMRC received more than 2,000 complaints about rebate firms in 2022

The commission charged is obviously a shocker, but that is not the issue here as your daughter insists she did not apply for a rebate given she cannot do her job remotely.

Ensign shared the documents relating to this claim with me. They appeared to be filled out and signed by SW, but she says the digital signature is a fake.

In a statement, lawyers acting for Total Tax Claims and Ensign Advisory say the allegation it was perpetrating a scam was completely untrue.

“Total Tax Claims and Ensign

Advisory, in all cases, obtain full signed written contractual mandates to obtain tax rebates for their customers. Without specific information and instructions provided by the applicant, no claim for a rebate can be submitted to HMRC. All fees for carrying out the work are notified and agreed by customers during sign-up. To be clear, tax rebates cannot be generated by Total Tax Claims and Ensign Advisory without the receipt of an application which contains the unique information pertaining to the particular taxpayer.

“Either the individual in question, or someone who was motivated to obtain a tax rebate on her behalf, and who additionally possessed her confidential private information, provided us with a signed mandate to obtain a rebate.

“They also had agreed our terms, including as to charges. This rebate was supplied to the individual, by cheque made out in her name, minus the deduction of the charges.”

“We are unable to speculate who might have made the application other than the individual herself, when only she stood to receive the monies.”

This case shines a light on a problem area as HMRC received

more than 2,000 complaints about rebate firms last year. The issues raised by consumers include the lack of transparency in agents' processes for signing up clients and high commission charges, and following a consultation the law is being tightened up.

Remember, you can make a tax rebate claim direct with HMRC via gov.uk; this is free and you will receive 100% of any refund. If you can show an agent has made an invalid claim on your behalf, you can report it on an online form. You tried this route but got nowhere, as HMRC said it had a document signed by SW giving Ensign permission to act on her behalf.

There are other negative reviews of Total Tax Claims and Ensign on Trustpilot, but they counter that the number is small in the context of more than 300,000 customers. Maybe other readers have had a similar experience they'd like to tell us about.

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Capital at risk.



◀ Richmond, London

£2m

A stiff drink is needed when reading through the credentials of this four-bedroom Thameside apartment. Its location, a few minutes' walk from Richmond town centre, and with views over the water and moorings, dictates the price tag. The rags-to-riches property was a brick workers' alehouse, the Three Pigeons Inn, built in 1870. It was converted into residences 137 years later. The split-level apartment has an open-plan kitchen/living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom on the ground floor, and two more bedrooms on the first floor. *Savills, 020 8614 9100*



Fantasy house hunt Homes for sale in former pubs

Compiled by Anna White

▶ Camden, London

£900,000

Mornington Crescent underground station is within stumbling distance of this two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in what was a Victorian pub. The square four-storey building, with arched windows on the ground floor and sash windows on the higher levels, sits proudly on a corner and conjures up images of patrons spilling out on to the wraparound pavement. The flat is spread over the basement and ground floor, with a sleek modern interior and a small, walled patio off the lower-floor bedroom via double doors. *Foxtons, 020 7424 6000*



▲ Bridport, Dorset

£350,000

The town was famous for its rope- and net-making trade in the middle ages because of ample supplies of flax and hemp grown in nearby fields. This shaped the town, with wide streets for stretching rope – which was thirsty work. On South Street is the entrance to what was a pub in the 18th century and is now a Grade II-listed building housing a three-bedroom, three-storey apartment. *Inigo, 020 3687 3071*

▼ Slinfold, West Sussex

£995,000

According to the agent (and the name), Starr Inn House was once a village pub deep in the countryside, three miles from Horsham. The Grade II-listed property is on the main street, with four bedrooms and two bathrooms. There is a cellar and rear patio. Slinfold still has an operational pub – the Red Lion – along with a cricket club and a primary school. *Hamptons, 01403 290 283*



◀ Spalding, Lincolnshire

£600,000

Until last century Old Welland Cottage was the Welland Inn. Now the double-fronted Georgian pub is a five-bedroom, three-bathroom house, still retaining tell-tale signs of its former life. The low timber beam and brick columns suggest the step down from bar to restaurant, and there are deep sash windows where the most coveted tables were once positioned. The current owners have held on to the building's roots, with a pool table in the front reception room, and wine is still stored in the wine cellar. The property is in a conservation area. *Fine & Country, 01780 750 200*



Puzzles

Sudoku

Easy

Medium

Expert

The normal rules of sudoku apply; fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9.

			1 5		4
7 9				6	
	2		4		3
		4	2	1 7	
			3 9		
6 7		5 1	2	9	
2			5		
5		9	7		

				4	
9 2 7					
6 8			9		
			7	1 6	
1		4	5		
		3 8		9	
2 6			3 7		
9	7	1	8 6		
3					

					5
			6 9	2	4
		2		9 1	
	4				
7			2 5		8
8			3		2 9
4 9				3	
	7		6 1		
6 1			8 3		

Futoshiki

Easy

Fill in the grid so that every row and column contains the numbers 1-5. The "greater than" or "less than" signs indicate where a number is larger or smaller than its neighbour.

4						
				v		
				2		
				^		
	2					
v						
	>		<	<	<	
			v	v		
		>		<		

Kids Word search

Find all the listed Albert Einstein in the grid, reading in straight lines, up, down or diagonally, either backwards or forwards.

AWARD, FORCE, GAS, GENIUS, IDEA, MASS, MATHS, MATTER, MODEL, NUCLEAR, PHYSICS, SPACE, STAR, TIME

M	A	S	S	Y	F	S	A	W
M	W	N	O	H	C	L	E	I
O	A	E	M	I	T	F	D	R
D	R	T	S	S	O	A	I	A
E	D	Y	T	R	G	N	M	E
L	H	A	C	E	O	A	T	L
P	R	E	L	I	R	B	S	C
B	N	G	E	N	I	U	S	U
O	T	E	C	A	P	S	H	N

Kids Countdown

Can you work out the answers to the sums below?

Easy	Medium	Hard
3	26	80
+ 19	+ 19	50% of it
÷ 11	2/3 of it	- 36
× 10	- 18	Square root of it
- 12	× 6	× 10
× 8	+ 23	+ 96
- 9	÷ 5	Quarter of it
÷ 5	+ 43	+ 184
+ 22	Half of it	Third of it
÷ 3	+ 32	- 38
Answer	Answer	Answer

Solutions

Kids Countdown
Hard: 33
Medium: 63
Easy: 11

Sudoku Easy

9	8	7	1	5	4	2	6	3
2	9	6	8	7	4	1	3	5
6	4	5	1	2	4	3	7	8
8	5	6	7	1	3	9	2	4
3	6	9	4	8	2	7	1	5
5	1	2	7	9	6	4	8	3
4	7	3	8	6	5	1	9	2
7	1	5	2	4	3	6	8	9
2	3	9	8	7	5	4	1	6

Sudoku Medium

8	3	5	6	4	7	1	9	2
5	9	8	3	1	2	4	7	6
1	2	6	9	5	3	7	4	8
7	1	4	8	3	5	6	2	9
6	7	4	1	8	3	5	9	2
2	1	9	4	5	9	6	3	8
4	8	1	3	6	7	2	5	9
3	6	2	7	5	4	1	8	9
7	5	1	8	2	4	6	3	9

Sudoku Expert

9	1	2	5	8	3	4	7	6
8	3	7	4	6	1	2	5	9
2	5	1	2	3	9	8	6	4
5	4	6	7	1	2	3	8	9
1	8	5	4	7	2	9	6	3
6	7	1	9	5	3	8	4	2
3	2	4	6	7	8	1	5	9
4	8	9	2	5	7	1	3	6
7	5	1	3	6	9	8	2	4
2	9	3	8	4	1	6	7	5

Futoshiki

1	3	2	4	5
3	4	1	2	5
5	3	4	1	2
4	1	5	2	3
2	5	3	4	1
3	2	1	5	4

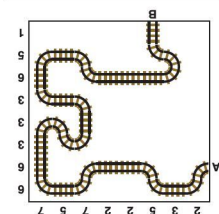
Kids Word search

O	T	E	C	A	P	S	H	N
B	N	G	E	N	I	U	S	I
S	E	L	I	N	B	S	C	L
C	E	L	I	N	B	S	C	L
L	H	A	C	E	O	A	T	L
E	D	Y	T	R	G	N	M	E
D	R	I	S	S	O	A	I	A
A	O	A	E	M	I	T	F	D
E	L	E	I	M	A	S	S	Y
A	W	N	O	H	C	L	E	I
M	A	S	S	Y	F	S	A	W



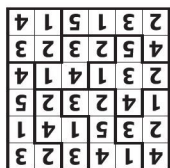
Puzzles

Solutions



Train tracks

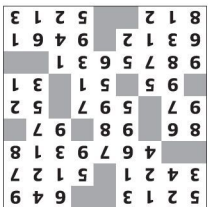
Word wheel
PRETENDER



Suguru



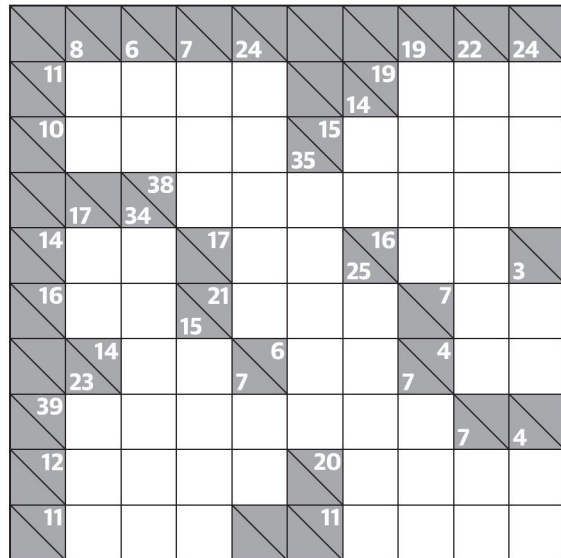
Codeword



Kakuro

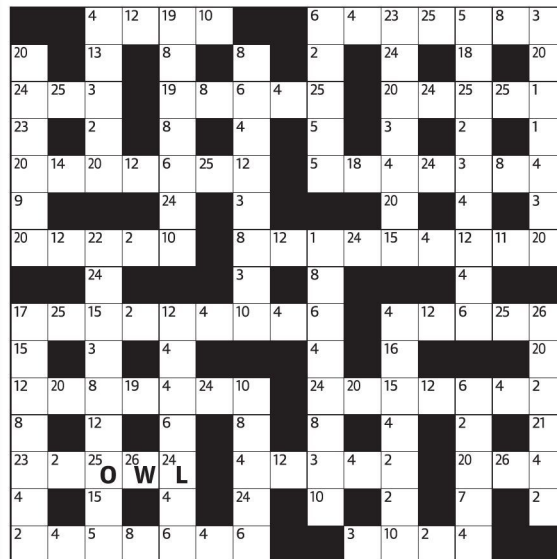
Kakuro

Fill the grid so that each block adds up to the total in the box above or to the left of it. You can only use the digits 1-9 and you must not use the same number twice in a block.



Codeword

Crack the code to fill in the crossword grid. Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. A number of letters have been decoded to help with the identification of other letters and words in the grid.

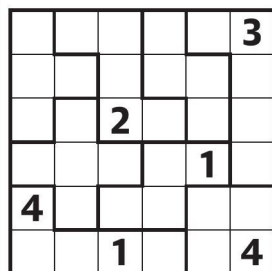


A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



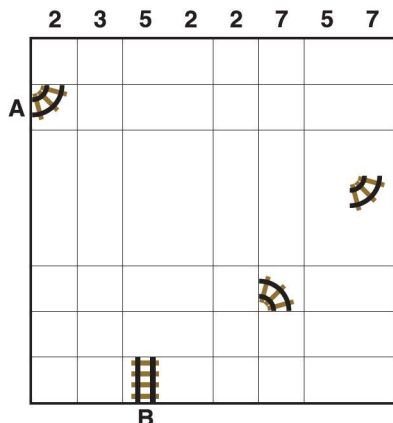
Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.



Train tracks

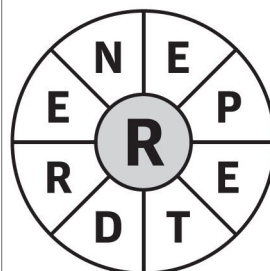
Lay tracks to enable the train to travel from village A to village B. The numbers indicate how many sections of rail go in each row and column. There are only straight rails and curved rails. The track cannot cross itself.



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Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least two others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. Target: excellent 31, good 26, average 19.



Puzzles

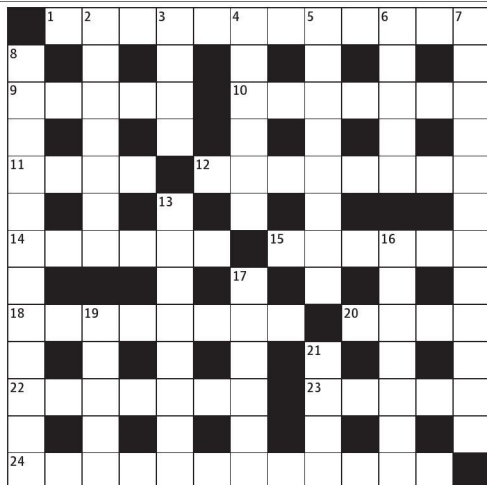
Quick crossword no 16,494

Across

- 1 Peatland plant – song has mumps (anag) (8,4)
- 9 Large spoon (5)
- 10 Georgia's capital (7)
- 11 Arabian sultanate (4)
- 12 Cheesy art or music (8)
- 14 Blood vessel (6)
- 15 African fly (6)
- 18 Upset (8)
- 20 Immaculate (4)
- 22 Drawing that explains how something works (7)
- 23 Mexico's last great indigenous empire (5)
- 24 Amount a government owes (8,4)

Down

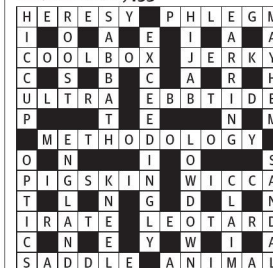
- 2 Sound file distributed over the internet for playback (7)
- 3 Again (4)
- 4 Spot (6)
- 5 Principal post on a sailing ship (8)
- 6 Loire (anag) – bay window (5)
- 7 Cocktail stirrer (7,5)
- 8 Without any warning (3,2,1,6)
- 13 Religious musical composition (8)
- 16 Type of washing machine (4-3)
- 17 Old girl (6)
- 19 Part of a javelin (5)
- 21 Hairless (4)



Yesterday's

Quick crossword

Solution no 16,493



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Sandwich sudoku

Medium

Place the digits from 1-9 in each row, column and 3x3 block. The clues outside the grid show the sum of the numbers placed between the 1 and 9 in that row or column.

	6	
		1
	1	7
9		
6		8
		2
4	1	
8		
	2	

35 33 5 4 3 0 3 8 22

Chris Maslanka

Solutions

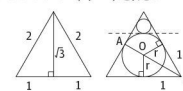
Pyrgic: 1 Even if you pronounce *Crédit* as the English word *Credit*, *Suisse* is pronounced as *Sweess* and not *Swizz* or *Swiss*. Ideally you should pronounce *Crédit* as *Kray Dee* (with a fricative *r*) but that's a lot to ask of the BBC *de nos jours*. As for *Giotto*, that's more *Jotto* than "Gee Otto".

2 If p is even put $p = 2k$. Then $2^{2k} - 1 = (2^k + 1)(2^k - 1)$. But in any such pair of successive odd numbers (ie one sandwiching a power of 2!) one must be divisible by 3. This is because in every trio of consecutive integers one is divisible by 3; in the trio of $2^k - 1$, 2^k and $2^k + 1$ the middle number, 2^k isn't divisible by 3, as 2 and 3 are different primes; so either $2^k - 1$ or $2^k + 1$ is divisible by 3. (This is the simple "binary-avoiding" proof hinted at last week.) But

which of the two is it? If p is even put $p = 2k$ with $k = 1, 2, 3, \dots$; and let $P(k)$ be the proposition that $2^{2(k)-1}$ is divisible by 3, then for $P(k+1)$ we consider $2^{2(k+1)-1} - 1 = (2^{2k})(2^2) - 1 = 4 \cdot (2^{2k}) - 1 = [3 \cdot (2^{2k})] + [2^{2k} - 1]$; the second number in $[\]$ is divisible by 3 as we have assumed $P(k)$ holds; so $P(k+1)$ holds. That is, if $P(k)$ holds, so does $P(k+1)$. But $P(0)$ holds as $2^0 - 1 = 0$, and 0 is divisible by 3; so $P(k)$ holds for all integral values of k . If p is even, $2^p - 1$ is divisible by 3. I leave the case where p is odd to the reader

3 By Pythagoras, the height (equal to AOB by symmetry) of the triangle is $\sqrt{3}$. Taking the bottom right little triangle: $OB^2 = (\sqrt{3} - r)^2 = r^2 + 1^2$ whence $r = 1/\sqrt{3} = \sqrt{3}/3$. The radius is a third of the height of the whole. The height of the upper

triangle is a third of the whole so
its radius is $r(2) = (\sqrt{3})/9$.



Points to Ponder If the process of stacking circles continues forever what will the sum of the radii be? What will be the sum of their areas?

4 4 snails, 2 peas works. Can you prove it's the only possibility?

Wordplay: Wordpool c), d), a); EPU COMPLICATE; Dropouts
IMPIETIES, MOIETIES; Cryptic
CRACKERS, THE ARCHIVES, THE
REST; Missing Links a) cartridge/
paper/work, b) fire/alarm/
clock, c) mountain/pass/port,
d) integrated/circuit/judge, e) river/
bank/details. f) flying/blind/spot.

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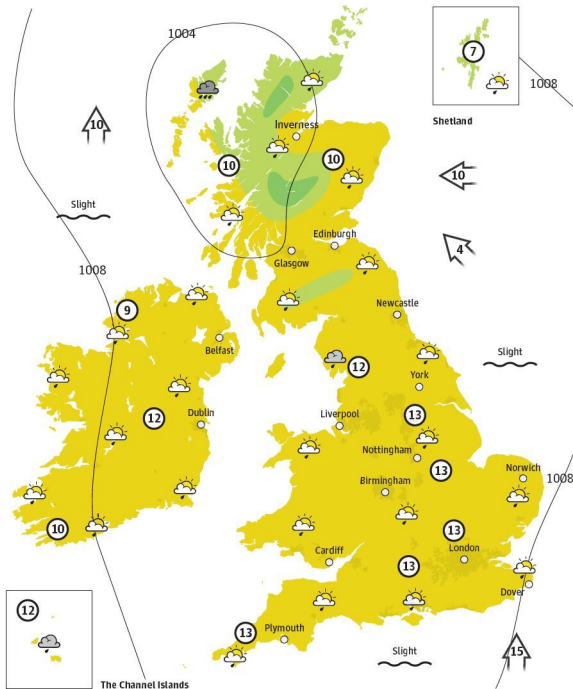


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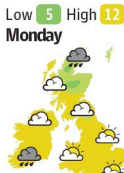
Weather

Saturday 18 March 2023

UK and Ireland Noon today



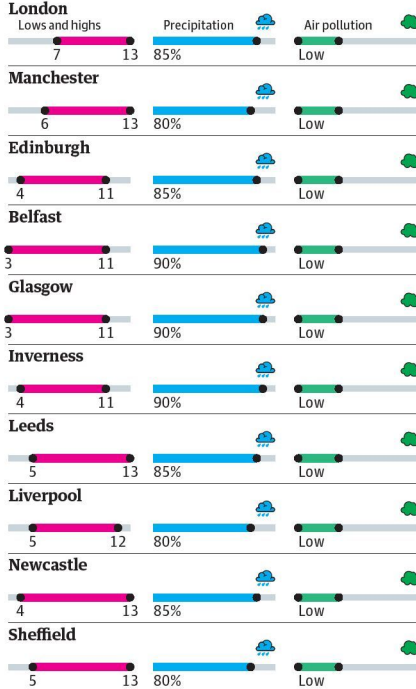
Forecast



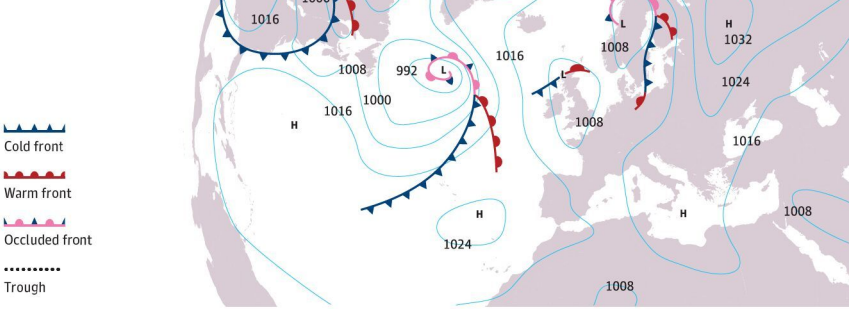
Carbon count



Around the UK



Atlantic front



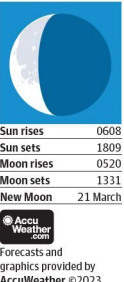
High tides

Aberdeen	1032	3.6m	2325	3.8m
Avonmouth	0402	10.2m	1645	10.7m
Barrow	0826	7.7m	2109	7.9m
Belfast	0801	2.9m	2049	3.0m
Cobh	0206	3.3m	1447	3.3m
Cromer	0343	4.2m	1554	4.3m
Dover	0825	5.6m	2053	5.8m
Dublin	0836	3.5m	2127	3.6m
Galway	0205	4.3m	1451	4.4m
Greenock	0938	2.8m	2219	2.9m
Harwich	0837	3.3m	2107	3.2m
Holyhead	0727	4.8m	2014	4.9m
Hull	0316	6.0m	1527	6.3m
Leith	--	--	1144	4.7m
Liverpool	0808	7.9m	2053	8.1m

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London Bridge	1038	6.1m	2322	6.0m
Lossiemouth	0842	3.3m	2141	3.6m
Milford Haven	0306	5.6m	1548	5.7m
Newquay	0202	5.6m	1443	5.8m
North Shields	0023	4.2m	1240	4.3m
Oban	0324	3.3m	1603	3.2m
Penzance	0132	4.6m	1415	4.6m
Plymouth	0226	4.6m	1517	4.6m
Portsmouth	0833	4.0m	2113	4.2m
Southport	0723	7.6m	2008	7.8m
Stornoway	0407	4.1m	1654	4.1m
Weymouth	0349	0.7m	1643	0.7m
Whitby	0054	4.6m	1313	4.7m
Wick	0814	2.9m	2116	3.0m
Workington	0836	6.9m	2117	7.1m

Sun & Moon



Lighting up

Belfast	1834 to 0631
Birm'ham	1816 to 0613
Brighton	1810 to 0606
Bristol	1820 to 0617
Carlisle	1820 to 0617
Cork	1843 to 0640
Dublin	1834 to 0631
Glasgow	1827 to 0624
Harlech	1825 to 0622
Inverness	1825 to 0622
London	1809 to 0606
M'chester	1818 to 0615
Newcastle	1816 to 0613
Norwich	1804 to 0601
Penzance	1831 to 0628

Weather tracker

Cyclone Freddy, which developed over the Indian Ocean more than a month ago, has dissipated this week, after making landfall a second time in southern Africa. The death toll linked to the storm had exceeded 300 across Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi by Thursday, with more than 700 people injured, 40 missing and 80,000 displaced.

The devastation was caused by severe flooding and landslides, which swept away roads and buried homes in mud. Power outages in Mozambique have affected small villages since last weekend, hindering rescue efforts.

Before Freddy, Malawi was experiencing its deadliest cholera outbreak, and it is feared flood waters could exacerbate the situation and reduce access to safe water and sanitation.

The World Meteorological Organization is setting up a committee to evaluate whether Freddy has broken the record for the longest-lasting tropical cyclone. The index used to measure the energy released by a tropical cyclone, known as accumulated cyclone energy, estimates Freddy had the equivalent energy of an entire North American hurricane season. *Alice Fowle MetDesk*

Around the world

Algiers	19	Lisbon	16
Ams'dam	15	Madrid	16
Athens	16	Malaga	22
Auckland	22	Melb'rne	35
B'Alres	27	Mexico C	23
Bangkok	34	Miami	30
Barcelona	16	Milan	16
Basra	28	Mombasa	33
Beijing	17	Moscow	3
Berlin	15	Mumbai	32
Bermuda	21	N Orleans	12
Brussels	13	Nairobi	27
Budapest	15	New Delhi	24
C'hagen	10	New York	12
Cairo	22	Oslo	8
Cape Town	23	Paris	16
Chicago	-2	Perth	27
Corfu	12	Prague	10
Dakar	27	Reykjavik	2
Dhaka	30	Rio de J	28
Dublin	12	Rome	16
Florence	18	Shanghai	12
Gibraltar	20	Singapore	31
H Kong	26	Stock'm	4
Harare	25	Strasbg	19
Helsinki	4	Sydney	30
Istanbul	8	Tel Aviv	20
Jo'burg	27	Tenerife	21
K Lumpur	35	Tokyo	8
K'mandu	20	Toronto	0
Kabul	15	Vancouver	12
Kingston	29	Vienna	13
Kolkata	29	Warsaw	11
L Angeles	23	Wash'ton	12
Lagos	32	Well'ton	19
Lima	26	Zurich	18

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